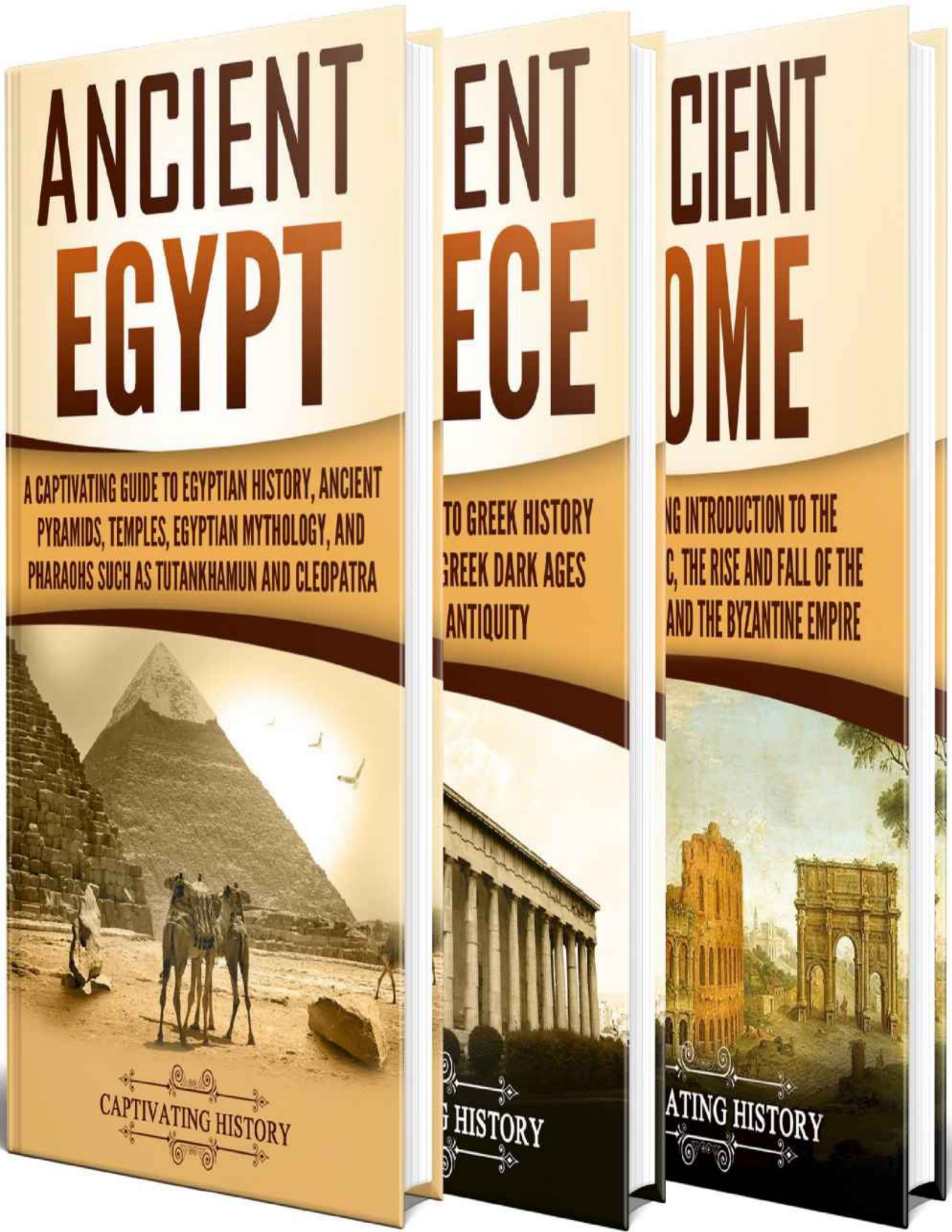
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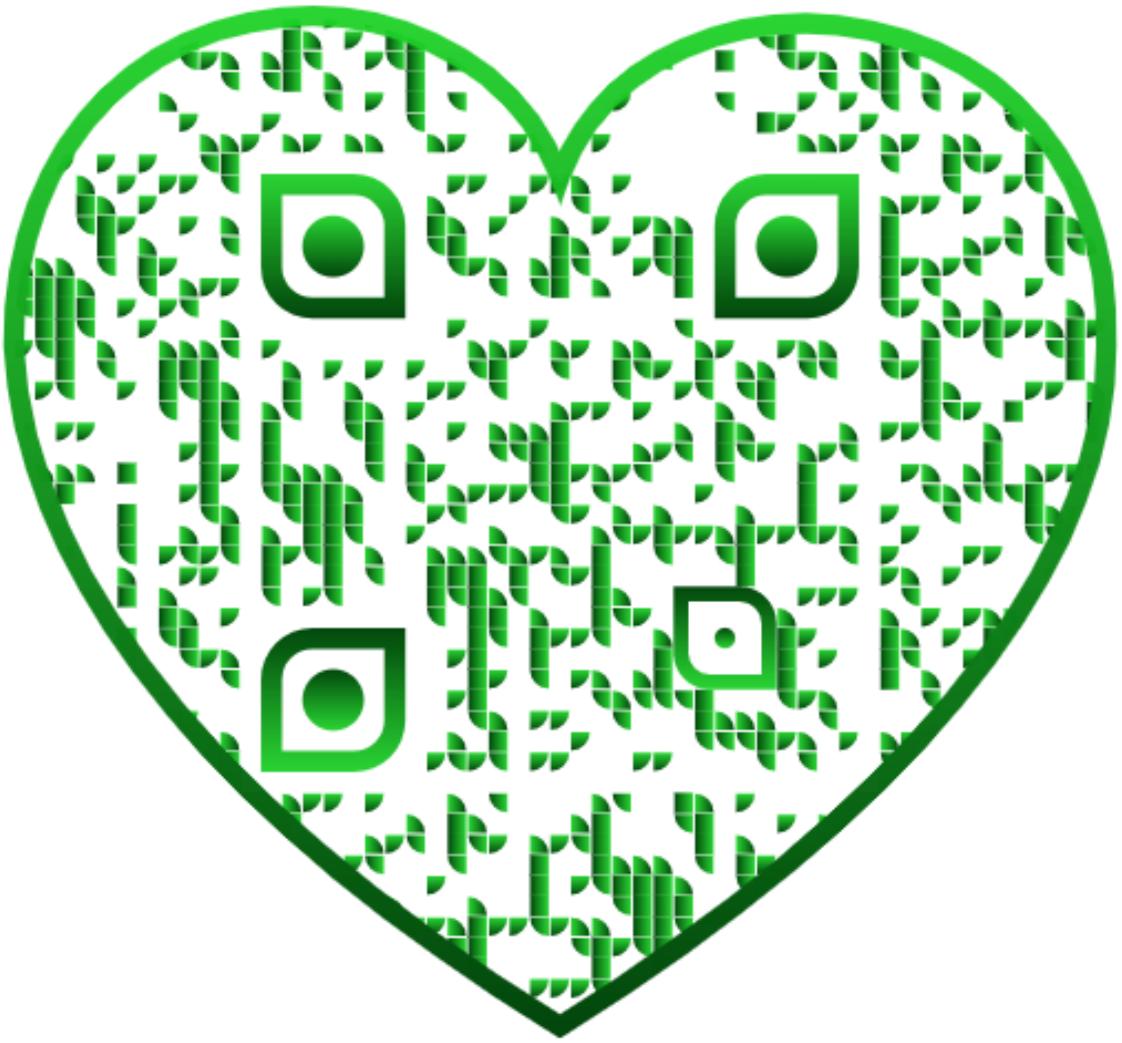

Ancient History

A Captivating Guide to Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome

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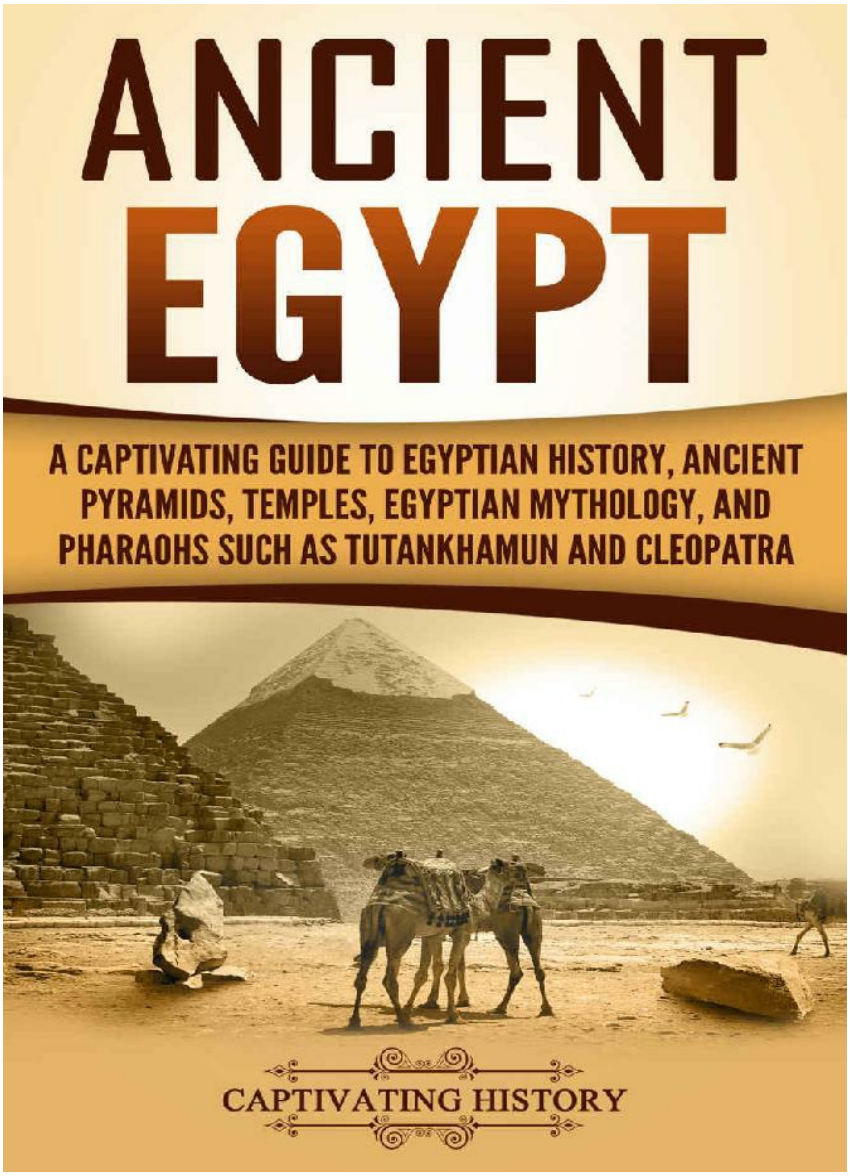
Part 1: Ancient Egypt

A Captivating Guide to Egyptian History, Ancient Pyramids, Temples, Egyptian Mythology, and Pharaohs such as Tutankhamun and Cleopatra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CAPTIVATING HISTORY

Introduction

When we think of ancient Egypt, the first things that cross our mind are mummies and pyramids, as well as the mysterious death of Tutankhamun. But that is merely a beginning. There are so many more fascinating things to discover and explore. Year after year, new excavations reveal amazing artifacts, such as clay objects that still display the fingerprints of ancient artisans. Other items help us discover the particular diseases an individual suffered from before he or she got mummified. So many small insights help us get to know ancient Egyptians—their daily lives, their drives, and motivations, emotions and weaknesses that are just like ours.

Numerous texts that have been discovered help us understand how the king, priests, and ordinary people lived and what they believed in. Those people created an incredible civilization. Their generals fought numerous battles. Their priests honored a pantheon of nearly 1,000 gods. Their kings created great architectural wonders — pyramids and a range of palaces, temples, villages, and arcane tombs.

The Ancient Egyptian Empire lasted for 3,000 years. Like many sovereign kingdoms, it emerged from the ruins that had left after the clashes of diverse forces that controlled fragmented territories, and developed into a nation that transformed North Africa and the surrounding world. Ancient Egypt gradually grew into a cultural epicenter, in which science and magic existed completely interconnected. The heights of human achievement in those golden ages are comparable to those of Ancient Greek and Roman societies at their peaks.

Those accomplishments occurred over a long period. Long before Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans subsequently invaded the country, Egyptians rose and fell entirely by themselves. There are the three major eras in the timeline of Ancient Egypt: the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the New Kingdom. The iconic monuments that have persisted millennia were built during the Old Kingdom. That was the time of cultural awakening and colossal construction. The Middle Kingdom was the period when a nation was united and reestablished. The New Kingdom was the time of aggressive expansion and cultural advancement.

Rather than being just an era of military triumph and expansion, the period when Egyptians shook the world was also a time of great innovation. They developed one of the first written languages (alongside Mesopotamia),

invented papyrus centuries before the Chinese made paper, and originated the basic calendar structure that we still use today. Moreover, the Ancient Egyptians formulated early forms of cosmetics, including even eye makeup, and breath mints.

One of the most fascinating and sophisticated civilizations in the known history, the Ancient Egyptians are remembered by their gods, pyramids, pharaohs, mummification, hieroglyphs, agriculture and much more. This book reveals the secrets of the captivating world of Ancient Egypt, the intriguing stories of its celebrities, such as the Akhenaten, Ramses the Great, Queen Cleopatra, and the boy-king Tut. You'll learn about mighty gods and the magical link between the Sun and the people of Egypt, and explore the horrendous burial rituals that warranted a safe path to the afterlife. Find out the secrets of one of the most magnificent societies that ever existed and discover why it still manages to seize the attention of the world.

Chronology Issues

It is almost impossible to apply specific dates to eras, reigns, battles, or ceremonies. The Egyptians did not use a centralized dating system. Instead, they referred to dates in regnal years of a king (e.g. year 3 of Ramses III or year 12 of Akhenaten), which still produces confusion and discrepancies between different historical sources.

In the third century BC, the Egyptian historian and priest Manetho invented the dynastic system, which—with some modifications—we still use today. He divided the Egyptian kings into 31 dynasties, grouped them into three kingdoms and three 'intermediate' periods between them.

- Early dynastic period: Dynasty 0–2, around 3150–2686 BC
- Old Kingdom: Third to sixth dynasties, around 2686–2181 BC
- First intermediate period: Seventh to tenth dynasties, around 2181–2040 BC
- Middle Kingdom: 11th to 12th dynasties, around 2040–1782 BC
- Second intermediate period: 13th to 17th dynasties, around 1782–1570 BC
- The New Kingdom: 18th to 20th dynasties, around 1570–1070 BC
- Third intermediate period: 21st to 26th dynasties, around 1080–525 BC
- Late period: 27th to 30th dynasties, around 525–332 BC[1]

The Kingdoms and Dynasties of Ancient Egypt: A Magnificent Empire and the Dark Side

Writing and kingship were two powerful signs of progress that enabled pharaonic civilization and distinguished it from other ancient cultures. The spectacular artifacts and abundant written record about the lives, deaths, and power of Egyptian pharaohs dominate our view of its history. We know its amazing works of art and cultural achievements. However, despite numerous written and other sources, we still know so little of the daily lives of ordinary citizens. That is why the renowned contemporary Egyptologist Tobi Wilkinson points out that ancient Egypt had a darker side.[2] There is plenty of evidence for the sinister side of pharaonic civilization. From human sacrifice in the First Dynasty to a peasants' revolt under the Ptolemies, ancient Egypt was a culture in which the relationship between the monarch and his people was based on oppression and terror, not love and admiration. King's power was absolute, and human life was cheap.

The first sovereigns in the Valley of Kings had quickly learned to use—and abuse—the remarkable power of ideology, as well as iconography, its visual counterpart. They managed to unite different groups and communities and bind them in loyalty to the pharaoh and his empire. First kings invented and utilized the tools of leadership that are still used in modern societies. Elaborate systems of symbols and wisely arranged public appearances helped isolate the ruler from the masses. Spectacular ceremonies on formal occasions served to fortify bonds of loyalty. Patriotic eagerness was regularly expressed, both orally and visually. Those means were supported by others, less benign strategies to maintain their grip on power. The strength of a king was increased by political propaganda, which reinforced an ideology of xenophobia. The population was closely monitored and dissent was brutally repressed.

The ancient Egyptians conceived the notion of the nation-state that still dominates the world. The Egyptians' concept was extraordinary, for both impact and longevity: the pharaonic state, as originally formed, lasted for three thousand years. Note that Rome barely survived one thousand year, while Western culture has yet to endure two.

Chapter 1 – Who Were Ancient Egyptians—Their Origins, History, and Geography

The Nile

The single most important entity that made the ancient Egyptian civilization possible was the Nile. The river made the life—and development—possible in an otherwise dry and desolate north-African desert. That is why Ancient Egypt is also known as the Nile valley. Because the Nile flows from south to north, the southern part of the country is counterintuitively called Upper Egypt, and the northern part is called Lower Egypt. Between July and October every year, the Nile flooded. The land on both banks was covered with water, which later receded, leaving the land covered with very fertile black silt. The Egyptians called their country the Black Land or Kemet. The Delta (the northern area where the Nile splits up into multiple canals that lead to the Mediterranean) was extraordinarily fertile. Papyrus grew there in large quantity. Agriculture flourished. However, there was always a risk of the Nile flooding excessively or insufficiently. Neither was good, as crop failure would result in famine and death.

The People

The Nile valley was a home to numerous ethnic groups of diverse origins. Before 5000 BC, the valley was inhabited by various nomadic tribes, both hunters and gatherers. Then a major climatic change caused the drying out of the area around what was to become the ancient Egypt Empire. The drought affected the populaces of large animals and further impacted the people who still had to find food and fresh water. Because of all this, the tribes came together from different directions and settled on the Nile valley, creating a whole new society. The Egyptian culture emerged from this range of diverse communities and languages.

The Development of Egyptian Society

The first settled communities led the Badarian way of life. These pastoral semi-nomads experienced numerous challenges over centuries, but things really started to accelerate when they all had to come together along the Nile valley. The abundance of resources created an interest for personal enhancement, and gradual stratification of society started to happen. People had become leaders and followers; a small ruling class had emerged and started to lead a much larger group of subjects. The rich grew richer and started funding a whole new class: specialist craftsmen. These professionals developed new technologies and products for their patrons. Only the rich had access to these prestige products, as well as other goods and materials.

Economic, cultural, and political changes were inevitable. The bunch of communities around the Nile valley had transformed into a complex society. The next step was the one towards the kingdom.

Unified Kingdom – The Legacy of King Narmer

The final drying out of the deserts around 3600 led to a sudden increase of population around the valley. Food production was intensified, urbanization was accelerated. Resources had become scarce, and the competition grew more substantial, which led to the development of first walled towns.

The people of what was to become a great kingdom were grouped in three regional groupings, with centers in the town of Tjeni (near modern Girga), Nubt (modern Nagada), and Nekhen. Each of them has its own ruler—probably a hereditary monarch. The rulers of the three groups wanted to demonstrate and enhance their authority by all means. Over time, their thirst for rare and precious objects grew. These kings wanted to own gold and precious stones, such as lapis lazuli. Because of this, both internal and external trade flourished. But this was not the only consequence. The rulers of three kingdoms saw each other as rivals, and the conflict was inevitable.

The rulers of Tjeni had a great advantage, as they already controlled two-thirds of the Egypt territory. Moreover, they had access to local harbors and established trade with Near East. After almost two centuries of antagonism, the king Narmer of Tjeni assumed the kingship of a united Egypt in around 2950. He commissioned an impressive ceremonial palette—the famous Narmer Palette—decorated with the scenes of his triumph, and devoted it in the temple at Nekhen, where it remained until its retrieval from the mud almost five millennia later.

Narmer has become the first king of the First Dynasty, the very first ruler of a united Egypt. The famous artifact from his age, the Narmer Palette, reveals a remarkable mastery of stone carving, and it shows already sophisticated art and royal iconography.

King Narmer / The Narmer Palette (Detail)

Besides revealing the artistic mastery of ancient Egyptian artisans, the Narmer Palette displays an exciting, obscure, and mysterious iconography that links Narmer's regime with a remote prehistoric past. Entwined creatures with long twisting necks, a bull crushing the walls of an enemy fortress, and other representations of forces of nature tell us much about the position of a king in early Egypt. The fact that Egyptian monuments and artifacts are made of stone is also significant: it implies permanence and immortality. Egyptian monuments were made to last forever.

Why were the iconography, monuments, and the written word so important?

The unification of Egypt was actually the creation of the world's first nation-state. The ancient Egyptians invented nationality—a common, shared identity for many different groups of people. Narmer managed to set up a governmental structure, collective values, and a very distinctive sense of Egyptian-ness.

The Egyptians invented regalia, such as crown and scepter, and they used architecture as a symbol of royal might. Despite the fact that ancient Egyptians developed a written language, the great majority of the population was illiterate. Because of that, iconography and architecture were extremely useful. On the other hand, a small class of literate people could pose a threat to the monarch. They were high officials and his closest advisors, and he needed to keep them on his side.

Hieroglyphs were extremely important too. Although they initially served an utterly mundane purpose—to facilitate record keeping—the ancient Egyptians were aware of the high ideological potential of written word. That is why they left inscriptions that contain their names, titles, and hierarchy everywhere.

The king of Two Lands

From Narmer to Cleopatra, a ruler who sought to be recognized as a true king (or queen) of Egypt had to balance and rule the opposites: Upper and Lower Egypt; the black and the red land; the realm of the living and the one of the dead. A true king of Egypt had to manage both sacred and secular aspects of life. Just as he was the head of state, he was also a god on earth.

Geography

Ancient Egypt was divided into Upper and Lower Egypt, as well as into the east and west, with the Nile as a border. The cities from the Predynastic period, such as Naqada, Hierakonpolis (Nekhen) and Abydos were all capitals at the time. However, during the Old Kingdom, one town had become the administrative capital. It was Memphis. All the royal cemeteries of the Old Kingdom, including the pyramid fields at Giza, were in close proximity. Much later, during the New Kingdom, Thebes (modern Luxor) became the new capital. To be more precise, Thebes turned into the religious capital, while Memphis remained the administrative one, ensuring the control over both Upper and Lower Egypt.

Chapter 2 – Who Held the Power: The Social Structure of Ancient Egypt

The ancient Egyptian society was highly stratified, and it could be well represented as a pyramid with the king at the top and the working class at the bottom. Right below the king were the priests, followed by a slightly bigger group of the ruling elite. The working class was at the bottom and it included a wide range of individuals, from highly skilled professionals, to utterly uneducated agricultural workers. They all had their defined place in this highly organized society.

The Pharaoh

Whether a regular heir or a usurper of the throne, the king was immensely powerful. His roles and functions, as well as responsibilities, were diverse. He was the high priest of each and every temple in the country. King was also head of the army in times of peace and war, and an international diplomat who signed peace treaties as well as trade arrangements. One of his roles was particularly interesting – the king served as an intermediary between the people and the gods. He held the title of Horus, an earthly incarnation of the highest divine existence. In short, an Egyptian king was a god himself. He was supposed to be able to talk directly with other gods, on behalf of the people of Egypt. One of his greatest responsibilities was to keep the gods happy. This was at times highly inconvenient. If the people of Egypt were afflicted with famine, war, or disease, it meant that the king was being punished.

The Priests and Elite

The position of a priest warranted a lot of power. The priests received many gifts and could become incredibly rich. They worked for the temple on the king's behalf, ensuring that the gods were satisfied, and the people were safe.

Local officials had power too. *Nomarchs*, or mayors, were in charge of their province or *nome*. They managed the economy, employment, and largely influenced the lives of people living in their territory. The nomarchs had a crucial role at times of war. Before the full-time army was introduced in the New Kingdom, the local leaders were responsible for recruiting and training healthy and strong young men from their nomes to fight for Egypt or to accompany the king on expeditions. As the military power was highly decentralized, the king had to keep good relationships with the nomarchs, he kept them on his side through presents and payments, and they became even more powerful in turn.

The second most powerful man after the king was the vizier. His responsibilities combined the ones of a state secretary and the ones of a personal assistant. The vizier compiled reports on all the important data for the whole of the country. He could do many things on the king's behalf, like distributing land and goods won at war to nomarchs or other officials, as prizes for their loyalty. The vizier was the head of justice, too. He presided over the court and dealt with the petitions, crimes and minor offenses on a daily basis.

The shift in power was common in ancient Egypt. Sometimes the vizier, a priest or other official surpassed the king in power. Ramses XI of the 20th dynasty was the high priest of Amun before he ended up on the throne. Furthermore, the priests of his time held more power than he did. The king Ay of the 18th dynasty was a vizier, and Horemheb was an army general, just like his successor, Ramses I. The disproportion of wealth and power is evident on the tombs and pyramids that were built at the end of the Old Kingdom. The royal pyramids are smaller and less expensive than the ones of high state officials.

The Lives of Ordinary People

The remains of several villages, such as Deir el Medina, Kahun, Pi-Ramses, Avaris, and Amarna provide valuable information on how local people lived and worked. It is interesting to know that all houses in ancient people were crowded with people. The houses (or mansions) of the elite were home to the owner and his family, but also for employees, servants, and administrators. However, they consisted of many rooms and corridors, which gave the owners sufficient privacy. In small houses of the working class, on the other hand, privacy was impossible. Couples had up to 15 children, and many generations shared the same four-roomed dwellings.

The working class was large and diverse. From agricultural workers who plowed the land for the wealthy and essentially worked for survival to well-paid scribes and privileged craftsmen – there was an abundance of different occupations an Egyptian could hold.

Education

Not many Egyptian boys could choose a career in ancient times, but they prepared for one from early age. It was a norm for the oldest son in a family to follow the father's footsteps and start learning farming, sculpting, or administration as soon as he's 5 years old. Other sons had to be useful too. They were trained by professionals in different careers, and some were well educated.

The elite, as well as particularly talented boys from the working class, were taught in formal temple and palace schools. Some of these schools were highly specialized and only accepted children from families of specific occupations. There was also a local alternative for boys who were not accepted into the elite schools. Village scribes sometimes taught local kids as well as their own children.

Girls were rarely educated. They were not accepted into formal educational institutions, as women were not permitted to hold administrative positions. Some of them were taught reading and writing, mostly because they were the daughters of scribes, but they were rare.

Five-year-olds learned reading, writing, and arithmetic. By the age of 9, all young Egyptians had to choose their career. An interesting text called the Satire of Trades[3] describes different trades in a negative light, promoting the advantages of the profession of the scribe. Written in the form of advice of the scribe Dua-Kheti to his son, it reveals the attitude of the scribal class towards manual workers. It, however, still serves as an invaluable source of information about the careers that Egyptian boys could choose.

The Careers

There were four main categories: manual work, administration, priesthood, and military service. All careers fell into one of these categories. Not everyone could become a priest, but literally everyone could find employment in farming and building. In the New Kingdom, Egypt's best and brightest boys had two choices—to become a soldier or a scribe. The life of a soldier seemed both exciting and glamorous to many boys. The scribal profession, on the other hand, offered a cozy, peaceful life with no physical effort, as well as knowledge, influence, and wealth. A successful scribe could even become a vizier, and we have seen what that means. The entire palace and its internal operations, the police force, as well as justice (the vizier acted as a judge in behalf of the king) were under the vizier's control. Of course, not everyone could become a vizier, but even a most ordinary scribe managed to live well. Most people were illiterate, and they needed the services of a scribe.

The priesthood was more an inheritance than a calling, as it was traditionally passed down from father to son. The priest was a servant of the god. Priests did not have much contact with the population. Their main responsibility was to ensure the prayers, offerings, and incantations were performed appropriately.

In the New Kingdom, Egyptian boys could be trained to become career soldiers. Before that, if an army was needed, the nomarchs grouped likely young men from their districts and recruited them for the expedition or campaign.

While the craftsmen who constructed and decorated tombs in the Valley of the Kings were well paid and enjoyed numerous benefits, less skilled manual workers had to work full hours for nine out of ten days just to survive. Agricultural workers had no days off. Furthermore, they owned no land. The majority of the agricultural land was owned by the king or the temple and was rented to the farmers, who had an obligation to produce the specified grain quotas. Otherwise, they were beaten.

It is important to mention that it is not true that slaves worked on the construction of the pyramids. Those were employers who were given good compensations and bonuses that allowed them to accumulate wealth, as well as health care. There are written proofs that the highly skilled construction workers and artists who were settled in Deir el Medina and were in charge of

major project in the Valley of the Kings could take as many days off as they wanted, even for a reason such as hangover—which was, surprisingly or not, one of the most common excuses.

While farmers and agricultural workers were the most impoverished members in ancient Egyptian society, their job was not the worst. The worst occupation, according to the *Satire of the Trades*, was the one of a laundryman. In a highly differentiated society of specialized professionals, such as the ancient Egypt, there was a need for professionals who would take care of people's loincloths. The laundrymen collected laundry from houses and washed it in the Nile using a simple soap made of natron and lime. Washing other men's loincloths was not only disgusting; it was also physically hard and dangerous. The clothes had to be crushed against stones in order for the stains to be removed. To make it even harder, the Nile was home to the number of crocodiles, parasitic worms, and potentially deadly biting insects.

Women

Egyptian women enjoyed a lot of freedom compared to most women in other ancient societies. They could walk around without a male companion, and had the same legal rights as men from their class. Even though they spent most of the time at home, they could earn money by selling goods they produced, such as bread, beer, linen, baskets, or vegetables. Some of them were employed in private households and held the positions that are similar to the modern role of housekeeper. Others worked as midwives—which was a lucrative and highly necessary occupation, considering the number of children in each family (usually between five and fifteen)—or wet nurses. Some of the Egyptian women were involved in the priesthood, holding various roles in the cults of goddesses such as Isis, Neith, or Hathor. Among other rights, Egyptian women could own, inherit, and bequeath property. However, royal women did not enjoy these freedoms. They were confined in the harem and were often used as political pawns. Too often, they were forced to marry a brother, the father (or an elderly vizier hungry for power, as we shall see in one of the subsequent chapters) and to engage in relationships that were far from natural, just to ensure that the throne remains within the family.

Ancient Egyptians married at very young age, and everyone was expected to have children. Weddings were informal, and so were divorces. Contrary to a popular misconception, Egyptians did not normally engage in incestuous relationships. Marriages between siblings did occasionally occur in royal families, entirely because of political reasons.

Elderly care was the responsibility of their children, especially daughters. Male children had to take care of the parents of their wives. However, some people, like the elite workers in Deir el Medina and the military, received a state pension. The average age of death was 35, due to early deaths caused by diseases or injuries, but it wasn’t unusual to reach very old age, even for our terms.

Chapter 3 – On Kings and their Military Power: A Chronological Overview of Kingdoms, Dynasties, Pharaohs, and their Achievements from the Pre-dynastic Period to the New Kingdom

Egyptians kept records of their kings and their accomplishments. These records are available in the form of *king lists*, which give us testimonies about pharaohs' names and titles, reign lengths, and major events. However, these lists are selective and do not contain all pharaohs. The dates are questionable too because ancient Egyptians did not have a unique calendar.

The Pre-dynastic Period

During the pre-dynastic period (from around 5000 BC to around 3000 BC[4]) two separate cultures existed: Upper and Lower Egypt. From the archaeological point of view, it is interesting that most Egyptian settlements were located in Lower Egypt (which was, contrary to today's common logic, on the North), while the cemeteries were positioned in Upper (southern) Egypt. The cultures of the Two Lands were a foundation to later Egyptian civilization.

King Narmer (dynasty 0) established the Egyptian civilization that we know today. He unified numerous locally governed regions using his military might. His ceremonial palette depicts the earliest battle scene ever documented in ancient Egypt. Its imagery—particularly the image of the king wearing the crown of both Upper and Lower Egypt—implies that Egypt should never be divided again. All pharaohs had to sustain this model and govern a united Egypt. The early dynastic period had started with the first dynasty and finished with the end of the second dynasty. Gradually, the state was entirely formed, and the pharaohs had started to build huge underground tombs, full of expensive goods.

The Old Kingdom – The Age of Pyramids

Even though the beginnings and early development of the Egyptian society can be tracked to the country's prehistoric past, thousands of years before the pyramids, the iconic monuments on the Giza plateau mark the first great cultural zenith of pharaonic culture. The ideology of divine kingship is what defines this period. The spreading of a belief in an emperor with divine authority was the most important triumph of Egypt's early kings. In the Egyptian consciousness, this belief became the only acceptable form of government—and it remained so for the next three thousand years. That is why this type of monarchy remained the longest-lasting political and religious system the world has ever seen. Art, writing, ceremony, and architecture of ancient Egypt all expressed the belief in this system and provided both the inspiration and the justification for colossal royal tombs.

The Old Kingdom had begun with the third dynasty (around 2686 BC), and ended with the sixth (around 2333 BC). That was the time when the great pyramids were built. The first pyramid was the one of King Djoser of the third dynasty. He built the Step Pyramid in Saqqara. The Great Pyramid of King Khufu at Giza represents the culmination of the evolution of pyramids. In the fifth dynasty, the Pyramid Texts became as important as the pyramids, and the sixth dynasty saw a decline. Floods, famine, and nobility growing richer than the kings (the tombs of the nobles are far more expensive than the ones of royals in the sixth dynasty)—all these factors marked the end of the Old Kingdom.

The First Intermediate Period

The end of the Old Kingdom was followed by a time of political unrest, called the first intermediate period. The poor rose up against the elite and the rulers. It was a time of anarchy in which people feared for their lives. According to the *Admonitions of Ipuwer*, people were afraid of their own family members. “A man regards his son as his enemy. […] The virtuous man goes in mourning because of what has happened in the land.”[5]

Egypt became divided again. The eighth dynasty’s administration was located in the Memphite region, and its rule was limited to the local area. The rest of Egypt was under the control of various insignificant leaders. When the eighth dynasty collapsed, the ninth dynasty started its rule from Herakleopolis. At one point, this dynasty retrieved the power over the whole of Egypt, but it divided again during the tenth and eleventh dynasty, when the capital moved to Thebes.

The Middle Kingdom – The Age of Fortresses and Military Expeditions

Mentuhotep I, the fourth pharaoh of the 11th dynasty, managed to reunite and take control of all of Egypt around 2100 BC. This was the beginning of the period called the Middle Kingdom. The king was still dependent on local governors. He needed their help in order to raise an army. The pharaoh Senwosret III of the 12th dynasty finally gained enough power to raise an army himself.

Just like the Old Kingdom is known for magnificent pyramids, the Middle Kingdom had its fortresses. This was a period of military expansion and increase of Egypt's territory. Every time Egyptians expanded to a new area, they built a large, impressive fortress to let the enemy know that the Egyptians were here to stay. In the 12th dynasty, the pharaoh Amenemhat I made a row of fortresses in the northeastern Delta to defend new borders. Also, a row of 17 fortresses was constructed in Nubia, well past the borders, to prevent the entrance of Nubians and to control the gold mines trade and other activities in the region. All fortresses shared common architectural elements, such as bastions (enabled soldiers to fire on the enemy), walls made of mud brick, with walkway at the top (enabled the soldiers to patrol the border), white ditches around the walls, and walled stairways to the Nile (enabled supplying and naval attacks). Some fortresses had walled towns and temples in close proximity.

The Second Intermediate Period

The Middle Kingdom ended and the second intermediate period began around 1800 BC, in a similar way like the first: floods, famine, and anarchy. At the same time, a number of immigrants from the area of Syria and Palestine (the Egyptians referred to them as Asiatics) came and were welcomed by the government, which sought to make use of their boat-making skills. Then the *Hyksos period* started. The rule over Egypt was divided again. The 15th dynasty—the Hyksos, empowered by the Asiatic community—ruled from Avaris in the north, while the 17th dynasty held the south from Thebes. The 17th dynasty pharaohs were Egyptians, but most likely they were just vassal rulers and didn't cause any trouble to the Hyksos.

Contrary the widespread myth that the Hyksos invaded Egypt from Palestine on their chariots, such event never took place. The Hyksos rulers belonged to the local Siro-Palestinian community that had been living in the Nile Delta for more than a century before the Hyksos period began.

Even though the Hyksos managed to gain control over both Upper and Lower Egypt by approximately 1600 BC, they got expelled eventually. In the time of the Hyksos king Apophis, the 17th dynasty king Seqenenre Tao fought against them. The king from Thebes died in battle, but his son Kamose continued to fight and, after him, his brother Ahmose managed to force the enemies out of Egypt.

The New Kingdom

The New Kingdom began with Ahmose's return to Egypt, around 1550 BC. He was the first king of the 18th dynasty, and he introduced numerous changes in government and administration. Most important of all, he established a full-time permanent army.

Everybody could join the army. The training started at the age of 5, and professional service started at the age of 20. Even though just like in other occupations, military roles were passed on from father to son, others could become soldiers and increase their ranks over time. The army was split into divisions of five thousand men. Each of them was named after a god. All generals of the divisions were royal sons. If there were not enough grown-up princes available, the title of general was given to a boy-prince. Divisions were highly specialized. There were archers, spearmen, charioteers, and foreign mercenaries—to name a few. The army was additionally divided into hosts, companies, platoons, and squads. Soldiers were accompanied by camp followers, responsible for cleaning, cooking, and fetching water; trumpeters and drummers who signaled the tactic during battles; standard bearers; and scribes who recorded the number of the enemy dead, by counting amputated body parts after a battle, as well as the number of prisoners. However, battle records are not quite reliable historical source. They were created for the purpose of propaganda. According to them, Egyptians never got hurt or killed in a battle, because they were unbeatable and scary for the enemies, who would often just run away with terror. Archeological evidence, on the other hand, shows that the reality was different. A number of mummies show the signs of battle wounds.

The introduction of permanent army changed Egypt forever, enabling the beginning of a new era. The New Kingdom grew into a true empire ruled by famous pharaohs Tutankhamun, Akhenaten, and Ramses II. Here begins one of the most interesting periods in ancient Egyptian civilization, the one that certainly deserves our close attention.

Chapter 4: The Magnificent Pharaohs of the New Kingdom and Their Empire

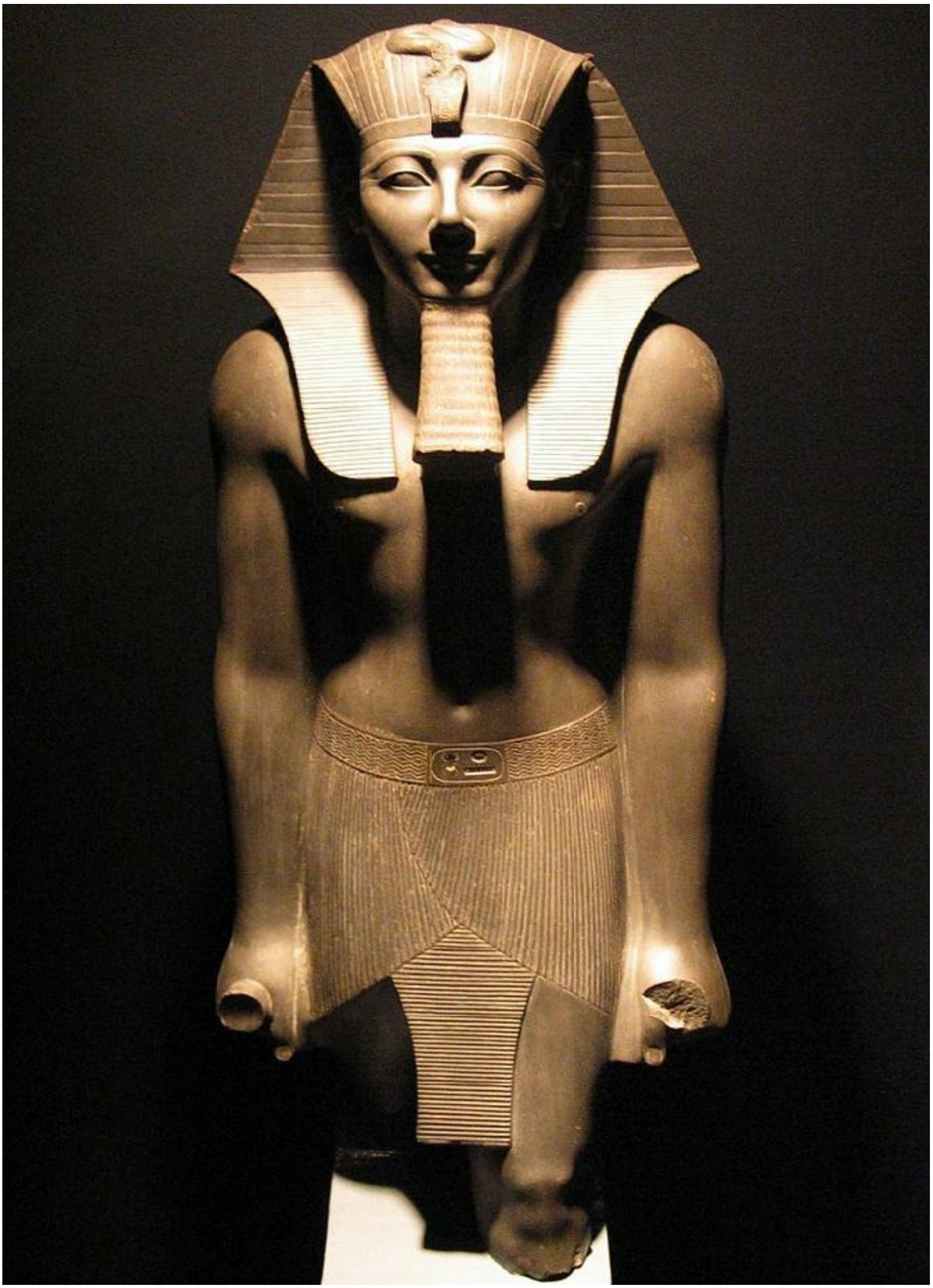
The New Kingdom started with successful military action and the expulsion of the Hyksos. It lasted from around 1570 to approximately 1070 BC and included the rulers from the 18th and 19th dynasties—the most powerful monarchs of the ancient world.

Not only that the 18th dynasty rulers had established a permanent army. They changed the Egypt's international policy forever. The pharaohs of the New Kingdom had set a new standard. Extending the borders had become essential and each pharaoh sought to claim larger territory than his father. As a result, a vast area of the Near East was brought under Egyptians' control. The new territories still had their own kings, but all of them were vassals loyal to Egypt.

Thutmosis III

Thutmosis III was the first Egyptian pharaoh who was fully devoted to empire building. He spent most of his life fighting and increasing the territory of Egypt. Because of this, modern Egyptologists often refer to him as the Egyptian Napoleon. His military successes are recorded in the Hall of Annals at Karnak temple.

The first Egyptian emperor was the son of Thutmosis II and his secondary wife Isis. He was still a child when his father died, leaving him the throne. Young monarch married his father first wife, Hatshepsut, who ruled the country until the king grew up. Meanwhile, he was training in the army. After 22 years of their rule, Hatshepsut died, and Thutmosis III, now a fully grown adult and skilled military leader, took over the throne and ruled for over 20 years.



Thutmosis III (1504-1450 BC), basalt statue in Luxor Museum

The Historical Armageddon

Most people do not know that the biblical term Armageddon (literally: “mount of Megiddo,” located in modern-day Israel) refers to a particular battle that took place there. There is a possibility that this actual battle was the one between Thutmosis III’s forces and the king of Kadesh in Syria—and not just him. Around 1476, during the first year of Thutmosis III’s solo rule, after his wife’s death, the king of Kadesh gathered a number of Palestinian cities. They joined forces to attack the borders of Egypt from the town of Megiddo, which was fortified and strategically desirable. The Egyptians took the direct route to Megiddo, even though that meant they would be in a vulnerable position. The Syrian army was assembled of more than 330 kings and their forces, greatly outnumbering the Egyptian army. In spite of that, Thutmosis III appeared fearless and influenced his men to be so, too. They marched in full battle regalia to enhance their morale and induce panic in the enemy lines, and—it worked. They were powerful, and the army at Megiddo ran away rapidly, leaving all their equipment behind. However, they couldn’t enter the fortress, as the gatekeepers at Megiddo refused to open the doors. Those inside the walls feared that the Egyptians would follow the Syrians in. The Egyptians, on the other hand, missed the opportunity to take over the fortification quickly, as they were too busy rummaging the weapons, chariots, and other goods the enemy left behind. At the end, it took Thutmosis and his men seven months to conquer Megiddo. The next step was to take the city of Kadesh, which was positioned on an important trade route and gave access to northern territories. At the end, as the result of these actions, both the pharaoh and his soldiers had become richer and more powerful.

Akhenaten

An equally famous 18th-dynasty king, albeit for wholly different reason, was Akhenaten. He is remembered as a heretic king, the one who changed the Egyptian religion from the worship of countless gods to the worship of a single god. This change was influenced by monotheism, but in Akhenaten's system, there were actually two gods. The pharaoh and his family had an exclusive right to worship the new god – the Aten or sun – and literally everyone else had to worship Akhenaten. While the Aten was the supreme god, Akhenaten elevated himself to the position of fully fledged deity.

Akhenaten (1350-1333 BC)[6]

His name meant “Spirit of the Aten,” but that was not the name he was given at birth. He was the youngest son of Amenhotep III, and initially, his name was Amenhotep, too. His family did not quite fit the contemporary

stereotype. Not only that his mother, Tiye, was not of royal birth; she was also a domineering woman. The contemporary art depicted her alongside her husband, as his equal. In earlier Egyptian history, however, the queens were always inferior. The Akhenaten's older brother, Thutmosis, passed away before he could become a king. He had three sisters, and two of them were married to his father.

Nefertiti

No one knows exactly who she was, where she came from, or who her parents were, but she married Akhenaten and gave birth to six princesses. The girls were usually depicted with the ruling couple, which was also unusual in their tradition. Nefertiti was related to the former queen Tiye, although the link is not quite clear. All we know is that the wife of Tiye's brother Ay was the 'wet-nurse of Nefertiti.' She could have been her mother, but there's still no evidence for such hypothesis.

Nefertiti was not the only member of Akhenaten's family whose origin was covered with mystery. There is a strong possibility that Tutankhamun was his son, as Tut was the son of Kiya, Akhenaten secondary wife. Furthermore, Akhenaten's successor on the throne was the enigmatic king Smenkhkare – and no one knows who he was. He might be another Akhenaten's son, or a son of Amenhotep III, or even Nefertiti in disguise. Whoever he was, he remained on the throne for a rather short period of time.

Akhenaten managed to change the religious system of Ancient Egypt completely. It took him around nine years to complete the revolution. We know all about it because this period is most thoroughly covered, compared to other periods in ancient Egyptian history. The Aten is the critical element in the reign of Akhenaten. The Aten was not some new, unheard-of god. He has always been present as an element of the broader solar cycle, as an epitome of the light that radiates from the sun disc. This light was usually depicted by hands emanating from the sun disc. Each hand was ending in small hands that form a sign of eternal life (ankh) to the royal family. The picture implies that the sun gives life. So Akhenaten essentially just raised this element of the sun deity and promoted it into the only sun god. The religious revolution had a practical purpose. Amenhotep III started to favor the Aten over other gods because he wanted to reduce the influence of the Priesthood of Amun at Karnak. This priesthood had almost as much power as the royal family. Akhenaten went a step further and replaced all gods with the Aten. Nine years into his reign, he closed all existing temples and redirected all income to the new temples of the Aten. Three years later, Akhenaten decided to expel all the traces of the cult of Amun. The names of Amun were deleted everywhere, even in the name of Amenhotep. This was a bit too much and, most probably, a number of people were deeply upset.

Akhenaten ruled from the new city at Amarna in central Egypt. Most likely,

he was a co-ruler with his father Amenhotep III, who was still situated at Thebes. Even though this was a divided rule, it was seen as acceptable.

We do not know how exactly Akhenaten died but some unfortunate and sometimes truly bizarre events preceded his death. Amenhotep III died in year 12 of Akhenaten's reign. In the next year, all signs of Nefertiti disappeared. She either died or, as some Egyptologists believe, changed her name and become a co-ruler. The year after, Akhenaten's mother, as well as one of his sisters, died. Three years later, Akhenaten died and soon after him, the mysterious heir Smenkhkare, who ruled as a co-ruler with Akhenaten for three years and alone for a couple of months.

All these deaths were due to "the Asiatic illness," which was, in fact, a plague epidemic. The disease defeated Amarna, which was seen by the populace as punishment for the religious revolution and abandonment of the traditional gods.

Tutankhamun

When both Akhenaten and Smenkhkare died, it wasn't easy to find an heir to the throne. The only suitable one was Tutankhamun, who was only seven years old at the time. Experts are not sure who his parents were, although his father was either Akhenaten (with Kiya or Tadukhipa) or Amenhotep III (with Tiye or Sitamun). He was born in Amarna, as Tutankhaten, but his name had to be changed when he became king.

The first thing that comes to mind when we hear of the name Tutankhamun is the treasure found in his tomb. However, these artifacts may not have featured whatsoever in Tut's life. Most of them are actually created specifically for the tomb.

Tutankhamun's innermost coffin

Tutankhamun's wife was Ankhesenamun (born as Ankhesenepaten). The couple ruled for ten years and had no surviving children. Two female babies were found in Tutankhamun's tomb. Unfortunately, the world's most famous pharaoh did not have an heir. Many believe that, since Tutankhamun was very young, he might have been under great influence of the general and

deputy king Horemheb and the vizier, Ay.

Tutankhamun abandoned Amarna and returned to traditional capitals of Egypt, Memphis, and Thebes. The Restoration Stela at Karnak temple says that he also restored the Egyptian religion and abandoned all the changes that Akhenaten had initiated.

Mysterious Death and an Unwanted Marriage

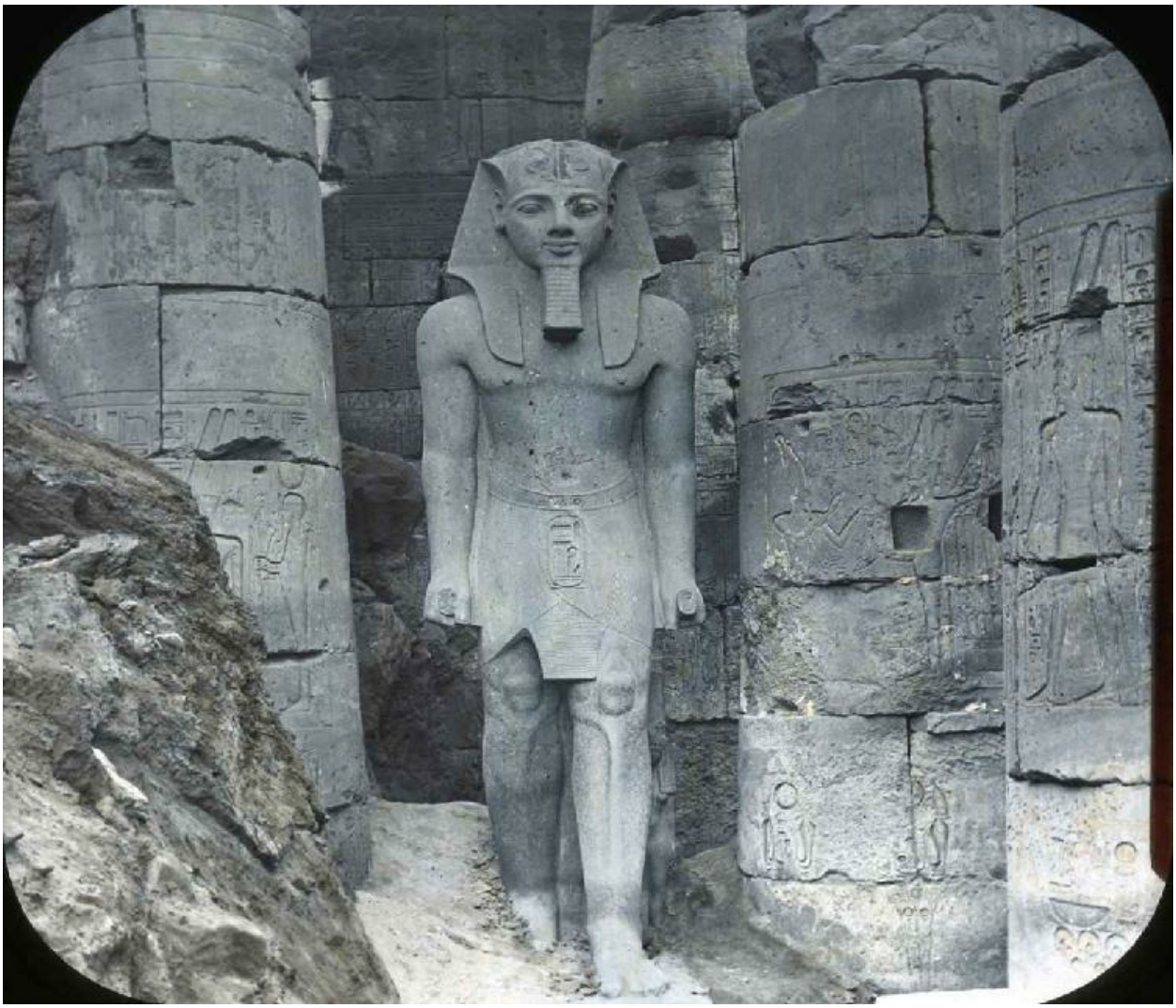
Even though a recent CT scan showed that Tutankhamun had not died from a blow to the head (the bone fractures that made everyone think the boy-king was murdered occurred long after his death), his death is still covered by a veil of mystery. Furthermore, Tut's death was followed by many intriguing events. His vizier, Ay (mentioned earlier in this chapter as the brother of Akhenaten's mother Tiye, and also peculiarly related to Nefertiti) took over the throne and was about to marry Tutankhamun's widow. Ankhesenamun was petrified with the idea, because, firstly, she despised his origin and referred to him as a servant and, secondly, because he was very old while she was in her early twenties. Perhaps there was a third reason too, maybe he had something to do with Tutankhamun's death, but we don't have any proofs at this point. The young widow-queen wrote a letter to the Hittite king Suppiluliumas, asking him to send one of his sons to Egypt. She hoped she would marry a young prince instead of the elderly servant. It took a while before the Hittite king realized she was honest in her request and sent one of his sons to Egypt. Unfortunately, the prince was killed on the way, and Ay certainly had something to do about it, as he married the unfortunate queen shortly after.

Ay was around 60 when he took the throne and ruled for only four years. The next on the throne was Horemheb, Tutankhamun's deputy king, and an army general. He ruled for 30 years and named one of his generals, Piramesis, as his successor at the throne. Ramses I (the name Piramesis took on taking the throne) was the first pharaoh of the 19th dynasty, but he only ruled for two years, leaving the throne to his son, Sety I.

The Recovery of Imperial Might: Sety I and Ramses II

A number of political problems started to emerge during the reigns of Sety I (1291-1278 BC) and his successors. The pharaohs of the previous dynasty, Akhenaten and Smenkhkare, neglected the boundaries of the decaying Egyptian empire, which needed to be re-established. As soon as he took the throne, Sety I heard that local tribal leaders were plotting rebellion, and so he entered a campaign across Syria. Sety I took the city of Kadesh, but the Hittites suppressed the Egyptians shortly after. However, the pharaoh and his army continued to take over fortified Syrian towns, either in battles, such as the one at Karnak, or through an act of surrender.

Sety's son Ramses II (also known as Ozymandias) thought it would be a great idea to claim divine birth. His parents, albeit on the throne, had a non-royal origin, and Ramses apparently saw that as a problem. Different images found at his mortuary temple at Luxor depict different gods, such as Amun or the ram-headed god Khnum, as his father. Anyway, Sety I had named his son as co-regent and they ruled together for a couple of years. Ramses was married to Nefertari, Isetnofret, and many others. He had a harem of 300 women, a present from his father. He also had numerous children. Some records show that he had 150 sons and 70 daughters, but these numbers are exaggerated. He seemed to have up to 46 sons and approximately 55 daughters. He had at least ten children with Nefertari and six of them were boys, but unfortunately, they all died before Ramses did. With Isetnofret, he had six children, and one of them had followed Ramses II on the throne. He was Ramses's 13th son, born as Merenptah.



Statue of Ramses II (1279-1212 BC), Luxor

Ramses II had earned his glory by leading a spectacular battle against the Hittites during the fifth year of his reign. This battle took place at Kadesh. Sety had triumphed at Kadesh before, but soon after that, the Hittites managed to get close to the Egyptian borders. Egypt needed to stop them by attacking them. The Hittite king had expected the assault, made a pact with many neighboring provinces, and gathered a huge army. Both sides utilized the same weapons, but the Hittite army was larger. The styles of the attack were different too. Ramses II led the division named after the god Amun. Other divisions were called Ra, Ptah, and Seth. While approaching Kadesh, the divisions split, and at one point the Amun division alone faced the Hittite forces. Most of Ramses's men died, and it was a miracle that he survived. The documents from this period say that the pharaoh fought the entire Hittite army on his own. Eventually, other divisions managed to join him and drive

the enemy back. The Hittites escaped into the walled city of Kadesh, and the Egyptians claimed victory. Sixteen years later, the Egyptians and the Hittites signed a peace treaty and ended all hostilities.

Tablet of the treaty between Hattushili III of Hatti and Ramesses II of Egypt, version found in

Boghazköi/ Hattusha[7]

The Last Mighty Pharaohs: Merenptah and Ramses III

Merenptah (1212-1202 BC) was Ramses II's 13th son. His reign was marked by continuous problems with the Libyans, who joined forces with a number of other tribes. The Sea People—25000 men with their families and belongings—were traveling to Egypt and attempting to invade it. In a couple of occasions, they managed to penetrate the Egyptian fortresses and devastate the guard. Merenptah led his archers, defeated the Libyans, and took many prisoners. All that Egyptians wanted was to live peacefully without fear, and the pharaoh enabled them to do so, albeit for a short period.

The invasions continued during the reign of Merenptah's son, Ramses III (1182–1151 BC). The Sea People had grown very strong; they managed to win an important battle against the Hittites, which enabled them to control trade in the near east on both land and sea. Ramses III confronted the Sea People on both land and sea and triumphed both times. His battle on the sea is one of the earliest naval battles ever documented in history. The Egyptian fleet of ships followed the enemy's fleet into the so-called 'river-mouths of the Delta,' and trapped the Sea People between the Egyptian boats and the shore. The Egyptian archers were waiting at the shore, ready to shower them with arrows. The Sea People were devastated. But the Libyans stroke again, in year 11 of Ramses III's reign.

Ramses III was the last pharaoh to reign in true traditional style. The periods that followed were tormented by divided land, assaults, and economic breakdown. The mighty kingdom that Thutmosis III built and Sety I and Ramses II preserved was gradually declining, together with the Egyptian civilization.

Chapter 5 – The Decay and End of the Egyptian Civilization

The traditional Egyptian culture started to sink at the end of the New Kingdom. With the 20th dynasty (1185-1070 BC), this powerful and economically strong country began to fall. The throne was divided and two or more kings ruled from separate cities. It was clearly a bad sign, as a united Egypt under one pharaoh was a vital part of ancient Egyptian tradition.

Third Intermediate Period

The fall of Egypt was a gradual process that lasted for over 1000 years. The country that Ramses II and Ramses III left as a legacy was still mighty, but it slowly declined until the age of Cleopatra. The Third Intermediate period lasted from 1080 BC to 525 BC. During that time, many rulers were reigning from different regions of Egypt, even at the same time. The period that followed was Late Period. Foreign invasion and frequent changes of dynasties characterized this epoch. Finally, the Greco-Roman Period (332-30 BC), which started off with the invasion of Alexander the Great, caused some major cultural changes.

The decline didn't happen overnight, but it was clearly evident during the reign of Ramses XI (1098-1070 BC). Various economic problems were slowly reducing the power of the pharaoh. The priests of Amun, on the other hand, were multiplying their power and wealth. Eventually, they became equally powerful as the pharaoh—the only difference was that the king still had the control over the army—and that was almost entirely his own fault. Ramses XI sponsored this escalation in power through countless gifts, aids, and construction works at the temple of Karnak in Luxor.

When the conflict between the Viceroy of Nubia, Panehsy, and the high priest of Amun, Amenhotep, Ramses took the latter's side. Furthermore, the religious pharaoh helped Amenhotep's successor at the position of the high priest of Amun, Herihor, to push him out from the throne. Ramses gave him the military titles that belonged to Panehsy. Now Herihor held both religious and military titles and became unstoppable in his ambition. He occupied the role of the pharaoh while the legitimate pharaoh was still alive. Herihor happened to have died before Ramses, but his successor, Piankhy, continued to rule the same way. Piankhy became a king after Ramses died, but remained so only for a couple of months. His influence was limited to the area around Thebes, in the south.

At the same time, at the north of the country, a man of unknown origin called Smendes (1069–1043 BC) married Ramses XI's daughter and claimed the throne of Egypt. He built his own capital at Tanis, on the ruins of Pi-Ramses. The next king on this throne was Psusennes I (1039-991 BC). The most interesting thing about him was that he let his daughter marry Menkhepere, the high priest of Amun. This marriage implies that the relationships between the northern and the southern rulers were good. They remained so for the

next 350 years, warranting peace and even prosperity.

Egypt was united once again during the rule of Sheshonq, who was, in fact, a Libyan chieftain. He had understood well that this unification was crucial in order for him to become a legitimate pharaoh. Moreover, he married an Egyptian princess—a daughter of Psusennes II, the last pharaoh in the 21st dynasty—and made sure his son held the title of high priest of Amun. However, the end of his 22nd dynasty was full of hostility and divisions, and even a civil war that lasted for more than ten years. During the next period, too many pharaohs (dynasties 22, 23, and 24) emerged at the same time, each ruling his own small area.

Around 727 BC, a serious threat emerged and forced the kings to work together. Nubia had become too powerful and presented a danger. The northern kings of Tanis (the 22nd dynasty), Leontopolis (the 23rd dynasty), and Sais (the 24th dynasty) united so that they could deal with the Nubian rulers (25th dynasty). The former tried to prevent the latter's control from escalating. The Nubian pharaoh at the time was Piankhy, who was, at the same time, the high priest of Amun. He and his son Shabaka managed to increase the power and gain the control over almost all of Egypt.

The next threat came from the Assyrian empire. The Assyrian king Esarhaddon entered Egypt in 671 BC, during the reign of Nubian pharaoh Taharqua. Esarhaddon's son Ashurbanipal managed to gain full control over Egypt, settle in Thebes, and become the king of Upper and Lower Egypt.

Late Period

In the next couple of decades, Egypt had vassal rulers, loyal to the Assyrian kings. New capital was Sais, and the ruling dynasty was the 26th one, also known as the Saite dynasty. However, one of the Saite rulers, Psamtik I (664-610 BC) decided he would not be a vassal king anymore. He already brought many changes, trying to reinstate past traditions. He resumed various elements of religion, ritual, and art, to show continuity with the culture of the Old and Middle Kingdoms. The next step in order to become a truly traditional pharaoh of Egypt is to set the country free from foreign influence. The Assyrians, on the other hand, had their own internal problems to deal with, and Psamtik I managed to gain control of Egypt in his own right.

Egypt was on the good track again. The next on the throne, Nekau II, further improved the status of Egypt, controlled Syria-Palestine, employed a number of Ionian Greeks and, with their help, established Egypt's first official naval service. The trade increased too, and Nekau II constructed a canal to the Red Sea. The trade relations intensified further, Egypt grew richer and a number of foreign immigrants came. They eventually started to cause problems and civil wars between different foreign groups during the reign of Ahmose II (a.k.a. Amasis; 570-526 BC).

Meanwhile, the Assyrian empire was crashed. The Persians took over Nineveh in 612 BC, continued to grow their power and territory, and eventually, in 525 BC invaded Egypt, and took the pharaoh, Psamtik III, with them as a prisoner of war. Thus started the Persian 27th dynasty, and endured for over 100 years (525-414 BC). The Persian king who originally won Egypt, Cambyses (525-522 BC), returned to Persia, leaving a local governor to rule on his behalf, but his successor Darius I (521-486 BC) got very much involved with Egypt's internal affairs. He built and repaired a number of objects, including temples and the canal to the Red Sea that the Saite king Nakau started. However, the Egyptians revolted. The next Persian king, Xerxes, finally crushed the revolt, but then the Greeks came. Egyptians, with the help of Greek mercenaries, managed to assassin Xerxes. They spent the following period trying to get rid of the Persians, while their culture and power declined further around 400. The next dynasties (the 28th, 29th, and 30th) were rather insignificant. The only ruler worth mentioning is the pharaoh Nectanebo II, the last ruler of the 30 dynasty, who fought against the Persian king Artaxerxes III and lost. He died in 343 BC as the last Egyptian

ruler on the throne. All subsequent rulers were foreign. Some historians consider the Persian rulers of Egypt as the 31st dynasty (343-332 BC). This dynasty, however, lasted for a rather short period and ended in 332 BC when Darius III opened the borders to let Alexander the Great in.

Alexander the Great and the Ptolemies

Alexander's goal at the time was to defeat the Persians. However, once he entered Egypt, he was genuinely interested in becoming a pharaoh. He traveled to Siwa, where the oracle of Amun was placed, in order to legitimize his place on the throne by proving that he was the divine son, predestined to be a king of Egypt. He stayed in Egypt for a while, renovating temples, building the new capital city, Alexandria, introducing a monetary system, and so on, but eventually he moved on and continued to conquer nations throughout the region. Alexandria was a large (with a population of more than half a million), cosmopolitan city, and a home to numerous Greek and Jewish immigrants, among others. The city was completed under Ptolemy II (285-246 BC).

Alexander the Great died in 323 BC. His son Alexander IV took the throne much later, because he was born after the father's death. Meanwhile, Alexander's generals effectively ruled. Ptolemy was the governor of Egypt and, later, established a dynasty of Ptolemies. All kings were called Ptolemy, so there were 15 Ptolemies. As for the queens, there were seven Cleopatras and four Berenices on the throne (and there were certainly much more Cleopatras and Berenices in the royal family). The Ptolemaic dynasty supported the Egyptian tradition but also brought many Hellenistic elements to it. These rulers were obsessed with taking the throne and staying on it, marrying their siblings and having children with them, in order to keep the family on the throne forever. This, however, did not mean that the relations inside the family were good. The family had a huge record of plots and murders.

- Phillip Arrhidaeus (the predecessor of the first Ptolemy) was murdered by one of his bodyguards.
- Berenice II was poisoned by her son Ptolemy IV.
- Arsinoe, Ptolemy IV's wife, was killed by the brother of Agathoclea, the Ptolemy's secondary wife
- Ptolemy VII was murdered by his uncle and stepfather Ptolemy VIII
- Memphites was killed by his father, Ptolemy VIII, who subsequently sent his corpse to his wife and sister, Cleopatra II, as a birthday present.
- Cleopatra III was probably killed by her younger son, Ptolemy X

(it is interesting that, prior to her death, her older son, Ptolemy IX, was indicted of conspiracy against her).

- Berenice, the daughter of Ptolemy IX, was assassinated a month after marrying Ptolemy XI, as he wasn't willing to share the throne with her.
- After 19 days, the public, appalled by the murder of the much-loved queen Berenice, lynched Ptolemy IX.
- The Romans killed the daughter of Ptolemy XII, because she tried to take over the throne, and she asked Julius Caesar for help.
- Cleopatra VII (yes, the right Cleopatra – the one we'll be talking about in the next chapter) probably had something to do with the death of her husband (and brother). Her goal was to promote her son Ptolemy XV to the throne and, that way, to protect him from the Romans.

The Romans were very much involved in Egypt's internal affairs and had helped many times to different Ptolemies. But the time had come to collect the debts.

Chapter 6 – A Romance, Politics, and Tragedy: The Story of Cleopatra VII

Cleopatra's father, Ptolemy XII, was weak, cruel, and highly unpopular ruler who often relied on the help from Rome to keep him on the throne. His eldest daughter Berenice had already swept him out of the throne once, but he managed to return. He died in 52 BC. His younger daughter, Cleopatra VII, married Ptolemy XIII, who was still a boy, and she thus became the sovereign ruler of Egypt.

Cleopatra and Julius Caesar

At the beginning, the Egyptian people loved Cleopatra. She cared about the people too and was the only ruler in the dynasty that spoke Egyptian. However, once her husband grew up, he managed to turn the populace against her by fraud. His associates distributed a decree in her name that all existing grain should be sent to Alexandria and none to the rest of Egypt. As a result, Cleopatra had to leave and find shelter in Ashkelon in Syria. In 48 BC, she raised an army and came to the border of Egypt, to take her brother/husband Ptolemy XIII down from the throne. The situation was so tense that Julius Caesar had to come to Alexandria to mediate. His goal was to help Cleopatra take the throne. Ptolemy's men tried to frighten Caesar by killing one of his friends and delivering the head as a gift. As a response, Caesar entered the city and took control over the palace. He ordered both Ptolemy and Cleopatra to discharge their armies and meet him. Cleopatra knew Ptolemy wouldn't let her enter Alexandria alive. So she entered hidden inside an oriental rug, which was delivered to Caesar as a gift. Caesar and Cleopatra became lovers, Ptolemy felt betrayed, and after six months of siege, the latter was drowned in the Nile. Cleopatra then married another boy, her brother Ptolemy XIV. Her relationship with Julius Caesar continued, and she gave birth to a son named Ptolemy Caesar, son of Julius Caesar and Cleopatra, also known as Caesarion.

A sculpted relief in the temple of Hathor at Denderah shows Cleopatra presenting her son to the gods to confirm that he was the heir to the throne.

The relationship with Caesar deepened over time; she spent two years in his palace, where she was given a number of gifts and titles. After Julius Caesar was murdered, she escaped back to Egypt, probably arranged the murder of her husband, and married her son, to make sure he would end up on the throne. Meanwhile, the Roman Empire became divided among Octavian, Marcus Lepidus, and Marcus Antonius.

Cleopatra and Marcus Antonius

Cleopatra and Marcus Antonius had already met once, when he visited Egypt with Caesar. The Romans met her father; Cleopatra was only 15 at the time. In 42 BC, they met again. She was 28 and he over 40. They became lovers and, according to Plutarch, they had fantastic time together. After a couple of years, Cleopatra gave birth to twins: Alexander Helios (the sun) and Cleopatra Selene (the moon). Antonius acknowledged paternity of the children. Later he even offered Alexander to marry the daughter of Armenian king, trying to appease a quarrel. The king of Armenia declined, and as a response, Antonius attacked him in 34 BC. Meanwhile, Octavian (later, the Emperor Augustus) had married his sister Octavia to Antonius, to keep him away from Egypt, but his endeavors were futile. In 36 BC in Antioch, Syria, Marcus Antonius and Cleopatra married dressed as the gods Osiris and Isis, the major deities from the myth of creation. Then Cleopatra gave birth to another boy, Ptolemy Philadelphus. In 34 BC, Antonius gave his children amazing titles and power. Alexander Helios became the king of Armenia; Cleopatra Selene became the queen of Cyrenaica and Crete, and Ptolemy Philadelphus became the king of Syria.

Octavian, just like the Romans in general, was upset by Antonius's actions. He decided to take the throne to himself and deal with Antonius and Cleopatra. As a result, in 31 BC, he fought Antonius's and Cleopatra's armies in a sea battle off the coast of Actium (northern Greece). When it became clear that they were losing, Cleopatra escaped and Antonius followed. The Romans were certain that it is a proof that Marcus Antonius was enslaved by his affection of Cleopatra, incapable of thinking or acting on his own.

In 30 BC, Octavian entered Alexandria. Marcus Antonius welcomed him with his weakened soldiers and navy, which, as soon as they saw the Romans, changed sides. Eventually, Antonius was left alone. Meanwhile, Cleopatra locked herself in her tomb and sent the message to Antony that she was dead. As a response, Antony tried to kill himself. His suicide attempt was now quite successful, but he did end up with a fatal wound, bleeding to death. Then he heard Cleopatra was actually alive, and demanded that to be taken to her instantly. Marcus Antonius died in Cleopatra's arms.

At the same time, Octavian had conquered Alexandria and taken charge of Cleopatra's palace. He planned to take Cleopatra to Rome and drag her through the streets in chains. The Romans couldn't enter the tomb. Cleopatra

didn’t let Octavian in, but negotiated with him through the closed door, demanding that her kingdom be handed to her children. While Cleopatra’s attention was focused on the door, Octavian’s men raised ladders and entered through the window. The queen of Egypt immediately attempted to stab herself, but the soldiers quickly disarmed her and imprisoned her and the children. However, Octavian permitted Cleopatra to bury Antonius in royal style. After the funeral Cleopatra stayed in bed, tormented by grief. She firmly decided to die and unite with her love on the other side, so she arranged for a basket of figs concealing an asp to be taken to her. Dying of the asp’s venom, the queen wrote a letter to Octavian requesting to be buried in Antonius’s tomb. After her death, the only person that could possess any threat to Octavian was Caesarion, but Octavian quickly got rid of him. From that point, Egypt belonged to the Romans.

Cleopatra’s death in 30 BC opened the path to Egypt for the Romans to take charge. Nevertheless, Egypt did not become a Roman province, in the true sense of the word, immediately. Octavian used the country as a personal estate. Egypt turned into the main source of grain to the Roman Empire.

But Egypt’s significance to Rome was not limited to its agricultural and mineral wealth. The country had access to both the Mediterranean and Red seas, and played a crucial role in Roman commerce—particularly trade with India, the source of the oriental luxuries that the ruling class loved so much. Egypt had a unique strategic position, at the nexus of paths linking Arabia, Asia, Africa, and Europe. This position might have been a crucial reason for Egypt’s power and wealth as an independent nation. Ironically, the same geographical advantage ensured Egypt’s fall by a succession of other empires. Rome, Byzantium, and Persia – they all saw Egypt as a source of wealth and a trading hub without peer – and so did the Caliphs, the Ottomans, and the British.

The End

The rulers who followed Octavian on the throne of Egypt tried to rule in traditional Egyptian way. They built temples to traditional Egyptian gods, and even represented themselves as Egyptian pharaohs while performing customary rituals. Even though the Egyptian culture changed so much due to the Hellenistic invasion by Alexander, a number of the Egyptian cults were preserved under the Roman rule. Philae temple was still in use in AD 394. This temple held the last inscription written in hieroglyphs in Egypt. 1,400 years passed before anyone could decipher it.

Chapter 7 – The Religion, Mythology, and Rituals of Ancient Egyptians

It may sound confusing that ancient Egyptians had at least 700 different gods (some sources even mention 2000 gods) but not everybody worshiped all the gods, all the time. Each god symbolized and personified a unique concept, function, or place where they were worshiped. People could choose a deity that suited their particular needs.

The religious practice of ancient Egyptians was strictly divided. State religion was all about the king and his divinity. The main, state gods were worshiped in large temples that were closed to the public. The king and the priests are the only people who could enter the temples such as Karnak, Luxor, Abydos, and Abu Simbel, and this sacred practice was effectively inaccessible to others. The ordinary people of Egypt worshiped other gods at their homes, outside the temples, without the priests.

Contrary to popular stereotype, the Egyptians did not actually believe their gods looked like the bizarre creatures represented on old images and hieroglyphs—animals or humans with inanimate objects instead of heads, or humans with animal heads. The goddess Hathor was indeed represented as a woman with the head of a cow, but only to emphasize her motherly nature. Similarly, the goddess Sekhmet's head was lioness's to highlight her aggressiveness. Selket's scorpion body demonstrated that she was the guardian goddess that protects against scorpion and spider bites. The images of other goods, in the same way, serve to inform us of their characteristics as well as their roles in the pantheon. Moreover, one god was often represented in a number of ways. The sun god Ra was either Khepri (beetle-headed human that symbolizes the sun at dawn) or Aten (the sun disc at noon), or Re-Horakhti (a man with falcon's head, or the sun on the horizon) or Flesh (a ram-headed creature and the sun at sunset).

The solar cult, which included worshiping the deities that were related to the solar circle, was especially important in all kingdoms and dynasties. That was because the Egyptians depended on the Sun—the incredibly powerful force that affected their lives. The solar gods are seen as creator gods, and were also closely linked with death the rebirth of the dead. Those gods could also help people increase their fortune and power. Because of this, and to demonstrate their divine origins, the kings included "son of Ra" in their titles.

The explanation for the fact that the Egyptians used to have so many gods lies in the fact they could mix and match their gods with others, by combining their attributes. When a god represented more than one characteristic, he or she was represented in two or more different deities. Amun-Ra, for example, was a mix of Amun, the creator god, and Ra, the solar god. Furthermore, some gods represent combinations of Egyptian and foreign deities: Seth (chaos) with the Canaanite Ball (lightning); Hathor (mother) with the Syrian Anat (marital); Osiris (god of the dead) with the Greek Dionysus (fertility); Isis (mother) with the Greek Aphrodite (love): and Imhotep (medicine) with the Greek Asklepios (also medicine).

The Fight between Order and Chaos: The Central Mythological Narrative

This multitude of deities, cults, and religious stories is unified through a small number of basic mythological themes. Unfortunately, the Egyptians did not have a single holy book, and most of the inscriptions at the temples were all about kings and their offerings to gods. National myths in form of a long narrative were never recovered. All the material that we have about those narratives comes from funerary texts that had the purpose of easing the transition into the afterlife. These sources contain a small number of mythological stories that occur over and over. The details vary from source to source, but basically they all tell the same story.[8]

- Creator comes into being in the nun (the primordial ocean, a watery chaos personified into a god). The primeval waters were dark and formless, but they held the potential for life just like chaos held the potential for order.[9] The waters of Nun retreat to reveal the first land (primordial mound), which rises from the nun. (1) The sun god emerges; the solar child is born; first sunrise occurs. Forces of chaos threaten the solar child; then protective deities save the child.[10] (2) The primordial mound is the setting for creation. The creator god Atum (usually depicted wearing the double crown of kingship) emerges at the same time, sitting on the mound. This god is the creator of both Universe and ancient Egypt's political system.[11]
- Living beings are created from either the bodily fluids, or thoughts, or words, or hands of the creator. The humans originate from Ra's tears. The air god separates the earth god and the sky goddess. Egypt is created as an element of the divine order. The war between chaos (*isfet*) and order (*maat*) continues.
- The creator sun god loses either his eye, or daughter, or defender, but she is persuaded to return. The sun god is mad at disobeying people and gods, and decides to destroy most of humanity and preserve the earth for heaven. Osiris, the mythical ruler of Egypt, is killed by his brother Seth. Osiris's sisters, Isis and Nephthys, are trying to find his damaged body. Isis finds the body and revives Osiris in order to conceive a son, Horus. The body of Osiris is mummified and protected from Seth's assaults. Isis, the divine

mother, gives birth to Horus in the marshes. The creatures of chaos poison the baby Horus, but he is healed. Horus and Seth fight against each other for the right to rule. Seth ends up with wounded testicles. Horus loses an eye, or both eyes, but another god (usually Thoth) restores the damaged eye(s). Horus avenges the death of Osiris. Seth is overpowered. Horus, as a result, becomes king of the living. Osiris becomes ruler of the underworld and judge of the dead.

- The sun god goes into the underworld every night. The chaos monster Apophis threatens, but various deities and spirits defend the sun god. The sun god joins Osiris. Together, they raise the dead. The sun god ascends in the morning to regenerate creation.
- The creator is tired, and he returns to the primordial ocean. World reverts to chaos.

It is important to emphasize the link between the Egyptian mythological narratives, religious doctrine, and the politics. The earliest creation myths, as well as all subsequent ones, support the notion of the divine nature of Egyptians rulers. Moreover, the first chronology of Egyptian rulers—the one established by Manetho, who first divided the pharaohs into dynasties—highlighted a single, unbroken succession of kings that links them to the moment of creation and the time of the gods. The creator god had set the pattern for kingship and each subsequent pharaoh was a legitimate inheritor of the throne. The reality, as we already know, was different. At periods of national disunity, a number of rulers based in different parts of Egypt were able to claim the title of the pharaoh and to rule at the same time in concurrent, overlapping dynasties.

At the Top of the Pantheon

The three main gods in ancient Egyptian religion are Osiris, Horus, and Seth. Osiris rules the underworld. According to ancient belief, when a king died, he became Osiris and continued to rule in the afterlife. Ancient art represents him as a mummy with the crook and flail, which demonstrate his permanent role as a king. Horus, the god of order, is Osiris's and Isis's son. The king of Egypt held the attributes of this deity. In fact, the Egyptians believed that the pharaoh was an incarnation of Horus on Earth. This god is usually depicted as a man with a hawk head. Seth was the god of chaos and the brother of Osiris, characterized as an awkward-looking human with a curved nose and long ears.

Correspondingly, there are three main goddesses: Isis, Nephthys, and Hathor. Isis, the divine mother, is both the sister and wife to Osiris and the mother of Horus. This goddess is depicted as a beautiful woman with a throne sign on her head, or as a kite, as her role is to provide the breath of life to the deceased. Nephthys. A goddess closely linked with rebirth, is the sister of Isis and Osiris. She helped her sister bring their brother back to life. Nephthys is represented similarly to Isis. Hathor is another mother goddess, the daughter of the sun god Ra, and goddess of love, beauty, fertility, sex, and death (she provides food for the deceased). Hathor is represented in several ways, all including the combination of body parts of a woman and a cow.

Maat was a separate deity that existed in all aspects of ancient Egyptians' lives. She symbolized cosmic balance, justice, and truth. This goddess was illustrated as a human with a feather on her head or just as a feather, because a feather was the hieroglyphic sign for truth. Judges in ancient Egypt were the priests of Maat.

Domestic Gods

It may sound strange, but the broad population did not particularly worship the mythical Horus—for them, their pharaoh was Horus himself—and the deities from the myth of creation. They had their own gods that were much closer to them, and they worshiped them in the home. The way they worshiped them was similar to the rituals in the temples. They kept the statues representing gods in their domestic shrines, and they fed, washed, and anointed them daily.

Hathor was a goddess particularly important in every home, as she was in charge of marriage, sexual love, fertility, conception, and childbirth. There was more than one deity related to fertility and childbirth. Bes, depicted as a dwarf with bowed legs, was regularly invoked during childbirth to ensure a safe birth and protect the mother and the infant. Taweret, the goddess represented as a pregnant hippo, also had a role of protecting women during childbirth.

The craftsmen who built the Valley of the Kings worshiped the creator god Ptah as the patron deity. They relied on this god to help them avoid and cure some work-related issues, such as blindness, which was very common among them, they also worshiped Meretseger, depicted as a cobra or a woman with the head of a cobra, ready to strike. Meretseger was in charge of protecting the people from bites from cobras, spiders, and scorpions.

Daily Rituals

The rituals were identical at all temples and homes in Egypt, regardless of the nature and function of different deities. The people at home did the same as the priests in temples. They entered the sanctuaries twice a day and carried out the rituals. At the moment of sunrise, the priest took the statue from the shrine and washed it, then rubbed it with ointments and perfumes. Finally, the priest dressed the statue in a clean linen shawl, and offered it food and drink. Food and drink were placed at the deity's feet to take spiritual nourishment. After that, the statue was either distributed among the priests in the temple, or among family members at home. In the evening, the same rituals took place. After the statue had been fed, it was put to bed inside the shrine.

The Main Cult Centers

The major deities had their own cult centers that had specific practices, symbols, and prayers. Ra was worshiped at Heliopolis. It looks like his temple was larger than the one at Karnak, but unfortunately, the excavation site is not open to the public at the present moment. Seth cult centers at Avaris and Qantir are also closed to the public. Amun was worshiped nationwide, but his main cult center was the magnificent temple complex at Karnak. Fortunately, we can visit this site, as well as the others such as Osiris's temple at Abydos, Isis's temple at Philae, and Hathor's temple at Denderah. Horus's three main temples were at Edfu, Kom Ombo, and Heliopolis; the first two are open to the public.

Sacred Festivals

A number of festivals took place month after month. They were a crucial part of worship. The largest and most important festivals were: Beautiful Festival of the Valley in Thebes, when families had an opportunity to feast with their dead relatives; Festival of Sokar-Osiris, celebrated as a mortuary or lunar festival at night, when people took offerings to both the god and the dead; Opet Festival at Thebes, which involved a procession from Karnak temple to Luxor temple, along the sphinx avenue, and carrying the statue of Amun; Festival of Drunkenness, different from the above, was celebrated at Deir el Medina and involved five days of drinking in honor of Hathor.

Amulets

Amulets were believed to have the power to protect their wearers and increase their strength. Amulets were figures made of different materials and usually attached to a necklace, bracelet, or ring. There were many different types of amulets, each providing protection of an individual deity from a particular threat. Not all amulets featured images of deities; many of them held symbolic, hieroglyphic signs and were related to specific aspects of mythology. The ankh represented eternal life. Scarabs were associated with the sun, new life, and rebirth. Eye of Horus was believed to protect from all evil forces, spiritual and physical alike. Hedgehogs were believed to help with fertility and rebirth. A leg represented health, because a leg is an element of the hieroglyphic sign for health. Two fingers protected the mummified bodies. Flies helped against insects. Frogs ensured fertility of women. A carpenter’s set-square and plumb-line granted eternal virtue and stability.

Amulets also served as status symbols. Wealthy individuals wore amulets made of expensive materials, like faience, or semi-precious stones such as amethyst, onyx, and carnelian.

Execration and Curse Figures

The power of figures was not limited to protection. They also served as a means of destruction. The Pharaoh used execration figures to devastate the political enemies of the country. The figures represented bound captives, each wearing a list of Egypt's traditional enemies (Asiatics, Nubians, Syrians, Libyans) on its torso. The king ritually broke and buried the figures, to ensure the fall of the enemy. Private individuals made curse figures to hurt and immobilize another individual.

Communication with the Deities

The people had a possibility of consulting oracles that provided answers to arguments and numerous personal and legal issues. The Egyptians could talk to oracles in temples or even on the streets, as long as there was a procession with the statue of the god around. People either placed a written message in front of the divine statue at the temple or asked the statue in the procession, which answered through the priests who carried it. The answers were always with ambiguous meanings and were not definitive. People could approach as many oracles as they wanted with the same question.

People also dreamed individual gods, but needed the help of the priests to interpret the meaning of the dreams. The priests answered their concerns, told them what they were supposed to do, and people, in turn, gave contributions to the temple.

The Cult of Ancestors and Deified Humans

In Egyptian villages, people honored the deceased family members and appealed to them for help with everyday issues. They believed that their ancestors had both the power to influence the lives of the living and to convey their messages to the gods of the afterlife. Because of that, the Egyptians kept their dead in close proximity, and included them in everyday activities and family meals. Most sitting rooms had false doors incorporated, to enable the ancestor's spirit to enter the home. Furthermore, the figures called ancestral busts, which represented the deceased ancestors, were placed in household shrines and taken to religious festivals and processions.

Some notable individuals were worshiped widely and addressed for reasons such as fertility, childbirth, and moral leadership. Famous deified humans were Imhotep, who was actually an architect (he built the step pyramid at Saqqara) but was deified as a god of medicine; Senworsret III, who founded the city of Kahun for the workers who worked on his pyramid; Amenhotep was worshiped in Deir el Medina because he founded the village; another Amenhotep, the vizier during the reign of pharaoh Amenhotep III was revered and worshipped for his wisdom; Horemheb was deified by Ramses II, who was thankful because Horemheb gave the throne to his grandfather, even though they weren't family.

Chapter 8 – Funerary Beliefs and Rituals: Mummification and Afterlife

Ancient Egyptians, just like people of all times and places, loved life. They wanted to live forever and believed they could achieve eternal life. According to their beliefs, an individual could make his or her life after death even better and more prosperous than the life before, as long they were well prepared for it. For them, the afterlife was the so-called *Field of Reeds*, which looked exactly like the earthly Egypt. The solar cycle was essential for the afterlife, because the dead would lay in primordial darkness if it weren't for the sun god who visited them each night.

The Elements of a Human Being

An individual, according to ancient Egyptians, was created from six components, which were separated at the moment of death. To ensure a successful resurrection, these elements needed to be reunited. This was achieved through the funerary customs. The six parts of a human were: the ka (life force), the ba (personality), the akh (spirit—the successful union of the ka and ba), the name (identity), the shadow (related to the solar cult; no sun – no shadow), and the body (contains all elements and needs to be preserved by the process of mummification).

The Pharaoh’s Curse

Hollywood movies are to be blamed for negative imagery around mummies, but not just Hollywood. When in 1922 Howard Carter and his team started the excavation of the tomb of Tutankhamun, they made use of the superstition of local people and the popular myth that entering that tomb would activate an ancient course. They knew that, if the locals believed the curse was true, they wouldn’t enter the tomb at night. So one day an English newspaper spread the word about the curse and, from that day, every time a person who happened to be a member of the excavation team died, even after 20 years, the public blamed the curse. The only death that was a bit awkward was the one of Lord Carnarvon, who passed out because of an infected insect bite. The excavation was not completely over at that point, and he was the one who sponsored it. At the time of his death, an electrical blackout happened in Cairo (which actually happens quite often), and many have interpreted this as a sure sign of the curse.

Nevertheless, even though there is no curse related to the tomb of Tutankhamun; thousands of tombs have been excavated in Egypt, and only two of them (Harkkhuf of the sixth dynasty and Ursa from early New Kingdom) contain curses in their inscriptions, to protect them from robbers. Egyptologists and historians seem to be safe, as they spread the word about the glory of pharaohs. According to ancient Egyptian religious doctrine, the repetition of a name ensures a prolonged afterlife.

Mummification in Practice

In the pre-dynastic period, the Egyptian customs involved burying the dead in shallow pits in the sand on the desert edge. These burial places weren't particularly arranged. The bodies were unwrapped and placed directly into the sand in a fetal position. The only funerary goods at that time were pots containing food and drink. Sometimes animals exposed the bodies, which were naturally preserved by the sand, and the Egyptians came up with the idea to ensure the preservation of the dead. During the next thousand years the Egyptians experimented with various mummification methods. Bodies were buried inside large clay pots, on shallow reed trays, or wrapped in animal skins. These methods didn't work. Since the bodies were isolated from the sand, which naturally preserved them, the soft tissues disintegrated. The Egyptians learned they needed to preserve the bodies before the burial. The first properly mummified body was the one of the pharaoh Djer of the first dynasty. Needless to say, mummification was available as an option only to the elite, while the others were still just being buried in the sand.

Herodotus gives us a detailed account of the mummification process and the role of a new kind of professional: the embalmer. Embalmers had their workshops in local cemetery sites. The senior embalmers were highly respected priests. The most senior embalmer wore a jackal mask, which represented the god of embalming, Anubis. However, according to Herodotus, the bodies of rich and powerful women, especially queens, were usually kept at their palaces for a couple of days before being taken to the workshop, to prevent the bodies from being defiled.

The pharaohs and, since the Middle Kingdom, the nobles, wanted to look like Osiris when they die. This request involved the most complicated and expensive process that involved removing the brain (the Egyptians believed that preserving the brain was unnecessary, because the thoughts and emotions occurred in the heart). This operation was performed in several very creative ways. The contents of the abdomen were removed too, with the exception of the heart. This job was not only gross but also dangerous, because the embalmer who did that part of the work was chased out of the workshop as a part of the ceremony, during which people threw stones and sticks at him. The royal abdomen was then cleaned with wine and spices, filled with aromatic substances and linen, and finally sewn up. The viscera were also preserved and kept in canopic jars. The bodies were wrapped 35-40 days after

the preservation. Large amounts of linen were used; some mummies were covered with more than 40 layers of the most expensive linen. The styles of wrapping varied and evolved over time, from wrapping each limb separately in the Old Kingdom; all limbs wrapped together and covered with a mummy mask in the Middle Kingdom; all the way to the portraits that were put among the wrappings in the Roman era.

It was of course not enough to preserve the bodies. Additional safety measures were included in the tombs to guarantee that nothing obstructed the deceased on their journey to rebirth and the afterlife. Guidebooks contained instructions that gave all necessary information to the deceased, and were inscribed on papyri, coffins, bandages, and walls. The earliest funerary texts are the pyramid texts. They were written in the burial chamber and antechamber of the pyramid and did not include any pictures. The green color of hieroglyphs represented regeneration. In the Middle Kingdom, the coffin texts were introduced, and the New Kingdom brought *The Book of the Dead* and the *Guides to the Hereafter*, each containing detailed instructions as well as numerous spells to help the deceased change the side swiftly, as well as to make his or her new life as good as possible.

Chapter 9 – The Architecture of Ancient Egypt: Temples and Pyramids

Temples

The temples were the most eye-catching structures on the ancient Egyptian landscape. Nevertheless, the public had no access to them; only the priests and the royal family could enter these magnificent places. There were two types of temples. Cult temples or houses of god were usually located on the east bank of the Nile and most of them were dedicated to one specific deity. Mortuary temples, on the other hand, were built to enable king's worshipers to keep his spirit nourished for the afterlife. They were also called temples of millions of years and were situated on the west bank of the Nile.

The Egyptians believed that the design of temples – just everything else – was defined in the remote past by the gods. Therefore they never changed the design of the temples, but instead they constructed bigger and bigger versions of the same designs.

The first temple in Egypt was built around 3200 BC at Hierakonpolis near Luxor. The deity worshiped at this temple was probably Horus, although no proofs were found of that. The temple was built on a raised mound of sand, which most probably was a symbolical representation of primordial mound. At Medamud near Thebes was another ancient cult temple, but it remains unclear which god was worshiped there.

The Middle Kingdom temples were very simple and symmetrical, but unfortunately most of them were destroyed in antiquity and replaced with new ones in the New Kingdom. The Karnak temple is special, because its design dates from the Middle Kingdom, but it also features New Kingdom influences. This temple – the largest religious center in the world – was built over the period of 2000 years. It is important to highlight that the ideal, traditional Egyptian temple is designed in the Middle Kingdom. The New Kingdom brought new conventions and the temples built during this period were more stylized than the ones before.

A panorama of the great hypostyle hall at Karnak

Many temples are improved by adding processional avenues or sphinx avenues, because they were lined by the statues of various sphinxes, such as ram-headed lions that represented the god Amun; falcon-headed lions, which represented Horus; human-headed lions that represented the pharaoh who constructed them; sphinxes with the head of a crocodile (representing the god Sobek), jackal (Anubis), or snake (the cobra goddess Wadjet). The last few sphinxes were found only at one temple – the mortuary temple of Amenhotep III at Luxor. The best-known processional avenue is the one between the temples at Luxor and Karnak. Many other temples, such as Abu Simbel in Nubia, also had such avenues, but unfortunately, they haven't been preserved.

During religious festivals, the priests walked through the avenues, carrying the sacred bark on their shoulders, but the public couldn't see them. Behind the two rows of sphinxes, there was also a wall. It was complicated to enter the temple. The entrance was always at the lowest point of the temple, and the priests needed to follow a fairly complex system of staircases or ramps in order to get to the sanctuary, which was always located at the rear.

Philae Temple[12]

Because the temples were inaccessible to the public, it wasn't easy to get into them. The exterior of the temple was uninviting by design and all temples were enclosed by huge walls, made of mud-bricks, which were sometimes more than 10 meters wide. These barriers kept people out efficiently, but they also offered protection during times of war or conflict for the royal family and priests.

The most important part of a temple was the sanctuary, the inner sanctum, or the Holy of Holies, which was placed at the highest point of the temple. The only people who were allowed to enter the sanctuary were the king and the high priest. Inside the sanctuary, an altar with a small shrine with golden or bronze doors protected the cult statue. For the Egyptians, this statue was not just a depiction of the god; it was home to the spirit of the god. That is why access to the statue was strictly prohibited for the populace.

Each temple represented the universe. Each sanctuary symbolized the primordial mound. Furthermore, a secret lake inside every temple represented the primordial waters. The water was used for the purification of the priests and the temple as well as in ritual offerings.

It is not easy for today's visitors to imagine what the temples originally looked like. The existing ruins appear like open, bright places. However, this impression is far from how the temples looked in ancient times. All the temple areas – excluding the sacred lake and first pillared hall – were covered with heavy stone roofs. The doors were large, heavy, and extremely difficult

to penetrate. There weren’t any windows. The light came in either through small holes inside the ceiling blocks, or from stone grilles up on the walls. In special occasions, the priests used oil lamps. The interior of a temple was without any doubt a dark and gloomy place.

A temple complex contained many outbuildings, which were important for the function of the temple. These outbuildings included the stores, kitchens, houses for the priests, stables, and, from the Ptolemaic period, the mammissi (birth house) and sanatorium.

The statue in the shrine was not the only sacred object that showed the devotion to the gods. Pharaohs also utilized painted or carved decoration, numerous statues, and obelisks. Obelisks were tall, needle-like structures made from a single block of stone, and each temple had at least two of them.

All ritual activities inside the temple were related to the secret statue in the sanctuary. The pharaoh was formally the high priest of all the cults in every temple in Egypt. His duty was to perform all the essential rituals required to maintain the cosmic order, or Maat. If the king neglected his duty to the gods, the country would fall into a state of chaos, including floods, famine, or invasion. The pharaoh, however, delegated this duty. Each temple had a separate high priest, but these priests did everything on king’s behalf rather than on their own.

Tombs

Egypt is famous for its burial sites, pyramids and tombs, both referred to as Houses of Eternity, in the Valley of the Kings. The Valley tombs are developed as the result of ages of evolution brought on by shifting religious priorities and growing security risks. All of them were meant to last for eternity, as a home for the deceased in the afterlife. None of them is actually complete. No tomb in the Valley of Kings or in entire Egypt is finished. Some of them were carved entirely out of the rock and never decorated. Others had been drawn, but the carving never started. Many tombs gave the impression of complete work, but the inscriptions or images are missing. The work in most cases was probably interrupted by the death of the intended recipient. Moreover, to complete a tomb would be to claim perfection, and looks like ancient Egyptian architects weren't keen to make such claim.

Based on the style, Egyptologists are sometimes able to tell the period when a tomb was built. However, literally all the tombs were robbed in ancient times. Sometimes the priest had to move the bodies to other buildings, to prevent further violation. A number of tombs do not contain bodies or grave goods.

Pyramids

Pyramids have become the synonym of ancient Egypt long ago. These structures were portrayed in many books and popular movies, but most often not in the way they deserve.

The function of pyramids was always funerary, but the details changed over time. In the Old and Middle Kingdom, pyramids served as tombs, which also showed the wealth and status of the deceased. In the New Kingdom, the pyramids were smaller and were used to surmount a tomb. They were not functioning as burial places.

The shape of the pyramid is significant itself. It is, in fact, a stylization of the primordial mound, called a benben, which was closely associated with the sun god. The pyramidal shape was thought to resemble the rays of the sun. Furthermore, the Pyramid Texts refer to the pyramid as a ramp leading to the sky, allowing the deceased pharaoh to join his ancestors.

The first pyramid was built at Meidum, near present-day Cairo, by the first pharaoh of the fourth dynasty, called Sneferu. The burial chamber of this pyramid had never been completed, and Snefery was most likely buried in one of the remaining two pyramids he built. Those pyramids are located at Dashur and are known as the Bent Pyramid (due to a change in design that went wrong) and the Red or North Pyramid. The latter was the first successfully constructed pyramid. It still exists at the site of Dashur, and it is huge; only the Great Pyramid of Khufu at Giza is bigger than it.

Khufu, the son of Sneferu, outperformed his father’s project with his pyramid at the new site of Giza, called the Great Pyramid. It was listed as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The bodies of the three queens of Khufu were buried in three satellite pyramids set in close proximity, on the east of the major pyramid. The pyramid complex still attracts a number of tourists from around the world. Khafra, the son of Khufu, knew he couldn’t compete with the monumentality of his father’s pyramid, and he did something else instead. He placed his construction on a higher area, which gave it the appearance of being bigger even though it is not. The next pharaoh buried at the Giza plateau was Menkaura. His pyramid is not as large of the previous two, but it was made of granite and limestone and therefore very valuable. On the other hand, Menkaura’s temples were larger than those of his ancestors. Another monumental object at the Giza plateau is the giant sphinx with a lion’s body and a human head, which obviously had the function of guardian.

The fifth-dynasty pharaohs, Unas and Djoser, built their pyramids at Saqqara. While the pyramid complex of Unas represents a perfect example of the fully developed form, the Djoser's pyramid is better preserved.

In the Middle Kingdom, many kings had complexes at sites such as Dashur, Lisht, El Lahur, and Hawara. In the New Kingdom, however, pharaohs were no longer buried in pyramids. They used secretive rock-cut tombs. The last development in pyramid evolution occurred at Abydos and Thebes during the reign of the 26th dynasty pharaohs. Notable new pyramids were no longer built, but many of the old ones still endure to remind humanity of its impermanence.

Conclusion – Exciting Excavations and Global Egyptomania: Why Are We So Obsessed with Ancient Egypt?

Egypt has had a distinctive charm since the times of ancient Greeks and Romans, who referred to it as a far older civilization, full of wonderful and mysterious monuments and inscriptions. They seemed to believe that Egyptian culture had arisen entirely formed and had disappeared just as abruptly.[13] However, its 3,000-year history throws a long shadow over subsequent centuries and we can still sense it today. The fascination with ancient Egypt continued in the Renaissance and flourished in the time of Napoleon, when the famous Rosetta Stone was discovered. In 1822, Champollion identified and deciphered the inscriptions on the stone and thus unlocked the secrets to the history of Ancient Egypt. In the 19th century, almost every notable person descended on the Nile, including Gustave Flaubert and Ulysses S. Grant. The interest had been heat up by the translation of the Rosetta Stone, which finally revealed most of what we know of the history of Ancient Egypt. Most, but not all. The real obsession had started a year later, in 1922, when magnificent artifacts were exhumed from Tutankhamun's tomb.

In late November of 1922, the English Egyptologist Howard Carter, accompanied by his patron, George Herbert, fifth Earl of Carnarvon, his daughter, Lady Evelyn, and Carter's friend, the engineer Arthur Callender, discovered an intact tomb from the age known as the New Kingdom, a time of mighty pharaohs and beautiful queens. That was the last hidden tomb in the Valley of the Kings, and the most attractive one. Its seals remained intact from the antique times, and it contained treasures of inconceivable luxury. The hieroglyphs on many of the objects clearly spelled out the name of the tomb owner: Tut-ankh-Amun. The king's burial rested within, having been undisturbed for the lengthy period of thirty-three centuries.

Replica of the golden mask of Tutankhamun in the Egyptian Museum[14]

The greatest discovery in the history of Egyptology had been made, and it was the first major archaeological discovery to be covered by the world's press. Newspaper headlines captured the public imagination and generated a wave of popular interest in the pharaohs' treasures. But it was only the beginning. It took a year before lifting the one-and-a-quarter-ton lid from the pharaoh's colossal stone sarcophagus was possible. Inside the sarcophagus, three nested coffins complemented the four gilded shrines in protecting the king's body. All coffins were filled with precious amulets and ritual objects, and the innermost coffin was made of pure gold. The boy king's mummified remains as well as his astonishing funerary mask—probably the most

splendid artifact ever recovered from an ancient civilization[15]—were revealed three years after the initial discovery. Meanwhile, the Earl of Carnarvon had died from blood poisoning and the nutshell of the stories that involved the curse of the pharaoh had been generated.

The global fascination with the ancient Egyptian civilization endured and is still present today. According to the author of “Egyptomania”, the obsession is based “on the fact that it is both comfortably familiar and intriguingly exotic.”[16]

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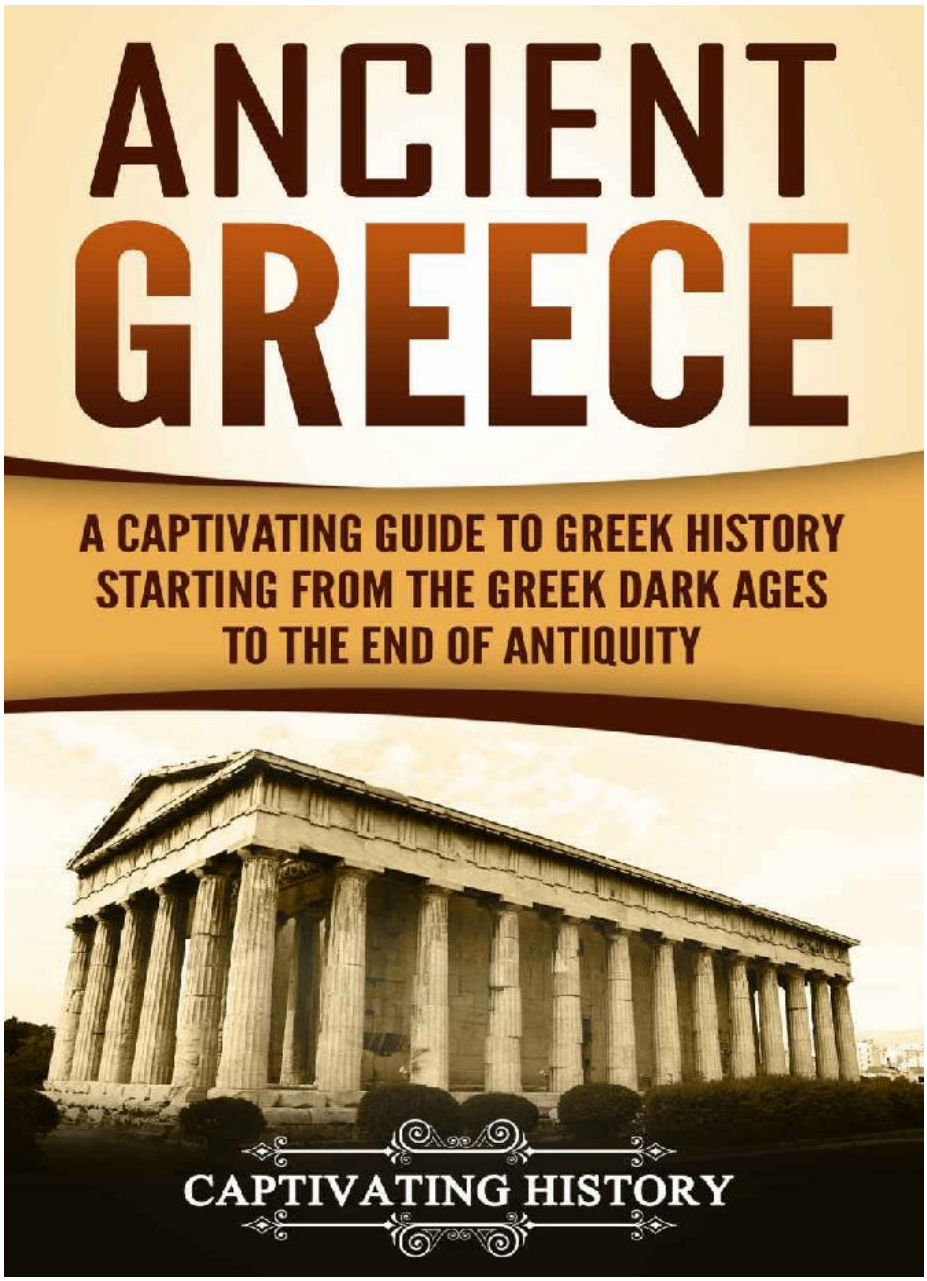
Part 2: Ancient Greece

A Captivating Guide to Greek History Starting from the Greek Dark Ages to the End of Antiquity



Introduction

The period commonly referred to as Ancient Greece spans a broad scope of time from the Grecian Dark Ages in approximately 1100 BC to the End of Antiquity in around AD 600. Just as the time is extensive in range, so was the geography of Greece. Over that period, in fact, the borders sometimes grew to encompass many other modern-day regions. At other times, the boundaries shrank, and for a period the region was under the dominion of the Roman Empire. Even still, the reach of Greece was strong, with neighbouring areas being profoundly influenced by Greek culture and events.

The culture and events of Greece were so influential they have a significant effect on modern-day people all over the world. The ancient Greeks gave birth to democracy, a political system frequently used and considered by some as the best form of government. Great minds from Greece also made incredible and vital discoveries such as the water mill, the basics of geometry and using medicine to cure illness. The ancient Greek philosophers laid the groundwork for a whole new field of thought and study. Ancient Greece offered the foundation of the Olympic games, which still run regularly today. Particularly famous historical figures such as Alexander the Great and Cleopatra also had ties to and roles during Greek history, through the course of wars and empire expansion.

Given the influence of Ancient Greece, as you learn about this time and place, you will learn about your history and the origins of the people, places, and institutions you likely regularly studied in school. Starting in the Dark Ages, it is quite a journey through the darkness, democracy, discovery, and development of Western Civilization.

Chapter 1 – Dawn of the Dark Ages

For approximately 500 years, the Mycenaean civilization resided in the geographic area now known as Greece. In about 1200 BC, the Mycenaean civilization started to collapse. Archaeological records suggest that by around 1100 BC, the cities, outlying settlements, and the entire organization of the Mycenaeans' culture began to be abandoned or destroyed. By 1050 BC, the recognizable features of Mycenaean culture had nearly entirely disappeared, and the population was significantly reduced. Many historians provide explanations for the cause of this downturn. Some attribute the fall of the Mycenaean civilization, which coincided with the collapse the Bronze Age, to climatic or environmental catastrophe. Others attribute it to invasion by the Dorians or the “Sea Peoples.” No single explanation fits all the available archaeological evidence.

Invasions by a group known as the “Sea Peoples” may have contributed to the collapse of the Mycenaean civilization. Their exact origins remain a mystery. The “Sea Peoples” may have come from as far away as the northern shores of the Black Sea, or from as close nearby as the Aegean Sea or from along the Mediterranean coasts of Asia Minor. The Egyptians named these peoples, in inscriptions and carvings at Karnak and Luxor. The Egyptians had some initial military successes against these foreign warriors. However, even Egypt could not escape the repercussions of these attacks, which spanned the entirety of the Eastern Mediterranean, subsuming the area of modern-day Greece, and leading to the dawn of the Dark Ages.

The collapse of Mycenaean civilization caused significant disruptions to people’s way of life in the region. There was economic hardship, famine, and political instability. Large-scale revolts took place, and powerful kingdoms were wholly overthrown. Crucial trade connections were lost. Towns and villages were abandoned or burned to the ground. The population of Greece was reduced, perhaps by half, and whole systems of organization ceased: state armies, kings, administrators, and trade connections disappeared.

Due to the collapse of large cities, great planned construction projects and wall painting for the arts could not continue to completion. The use of the Linear B writing system ceased. This reduced the ability for record keeping and therefore information on this period in Greek history comes only from

the remains and artifacts found in burial sites.

The fragmented societies that remained were mostly isolated from one another, and thus each developed their own cultures, pottery styles, burial practices, and other settlement features. Again, records are almost non-existent, but pottery has been found in archaeological sites. The pottery style, which is known as Proto-Geometric, was substantially less complex than designs that existed before the collapse. This is a sign that progress in development had been lost and in some cases, even regressed.

It is likely that during this period, the divisions of the region were organized by kinship groups and the oikoi (or households). This style laid the origins of the later poleis (political nature of Greece). Due to the disparate societies, generalizations about a more extensive community cannot be made. The various people throughout the region that survived the initial collapse cannot be grouped in any meaningful way because they spent too much time disconnected from each other. Some areas in Greece, such as Attica, Euboea, and central Crete, recovered their economy faster than others.

Luckily, not all was lost for the future of the region. There were still some advances during this time. They were just limited and slower in progress than they may have otherwise been. There was still farming, weaving, metalworking, and pottery, but at a much lower level of output and only for local consumption. There was some limited technical progress, such as a faster potter's wheel and the development of the compass (for the drawing of geometric patterns). Longer lasting glazes were also developed by higher firing temperature.

Perhaps most importantly and influential for the ongoing history of the region, methods for smelting iron came from Cyprus and the Levant, and drew upon local sources of iron ore. Iron weapons were now within reach of less elite warriors, and the universal adoption of iron was a critical feature for most Dark Age settlements. From 1050 onward, several local iron industries appeared, and by 900, almost all graves contained at least some iron implements.

With time and work, some communities were able to return from their setbacks. Archaeologists can study these communities to better understand their structure and the timing of events. For example, excavations of Dark Age communities such as Nicosia in the Peloponnese have demonstrated how a Bronze Age town was abandoned in 1150 but then re-emerged as a small

cluster of villages by 1075.

At that time, only around 40 families were living there with plenty of good farming land and grazing for cattle. The remains of a 10th-century building, including a megaron (great hall typical of Greek palaces), on the top of the ridge, have led to speculation this was the leader's house or a place of religious significance. This was a larger structure than those surrounding it, but it was still made from the same materials (mud brick and thatched roof).

High-status individuals did, in fact, exist in the Dark Ages, but their standard of living was not significantly higher than others in their village. Most Greeks did not live in isolated farmsteads because living far from organized societies increased the danger and risk of being attacked by enemies. Instead, they lived in small settlements. It is likely that for the next two to three hundred years, the primary economic source for most families was through farming on their ancestral plot of land.

The archaeological records show that by the start of the 8th century BC, several sites in Greece saw robust economic recovery. Long distance trade was re-established, by connecting the Near East, Greece, Egypt, and Italy. Archaeological findings show Greek pottery in northern Syria and among the Villanovan culture in Italy, which shows evidence for those trade routes.

As time passed, the forms, styles, and decoration of pottery became more complex and included figurative scenes that appear to come from the Homeric Epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. This showed that attention to the arts had re-emerged. Iron tools and weapons also continued to develop and increased in quality.

Mediterranean trade brought new supplies of copper and tin to the region of Greece from distant places. This allowed artisans to craft a wide variety of elaborate bronze tools and items. Other coastal regions of Greece were once again becoming full participants in the commercial and cultural exchanges of the eastern and central Mediterranean. Simultaneously, local governance increased in complexity, changing from single-leader autocracies to oligarchies or other forms of aristocratic rulership.

Although the region of Greece had faced its Dark Ages, which brought setbacks to their way of life. The people re-built all that was lost. As methods for government started to evolve there, the region moved from the Dark ages into the enlightenment of Democracy.

Chapter 2 – From Darkness to Democracy

As the region of Greece moved away from the demand for mere survival brought about by the Dark Ages, the people could think about living well. The existing state organization, government, and political leadership had been comprised of many separate, but equal groups. Luckily, the Grecian people saw a better solution than just infighting for power. They envisioned a solution for governance that would allow all people to be considered equally. It was a revolutionary approach, and one many countries use today—Democracy.

The development of Democracy among the Greek city-states was slow, yet continually developing process. Democracy in Athens grew in fits and starts, but eventually, it blossomed to its fullest extent. Its humble beginnings began with the politician Solon.

In the period before Solon's leadership, most of the city-states had tyrannical (rule by a single person), aristocratic, or oligarchic governments. Then, in 632 BC, following the misinterpreted advice of an oracle, a nobleman named Cylon, attempted a coup in Athens. The coup failed with Cylon, his brother, and other followers seeking refuge in the Temple of Athena. Cylon and his brother eventually escaped. The attempted coup resulted in a period of shifting alliances and economic stagnation in Athens.

In approximately 593 BC, due to the political climate of the time, Solon was given almost unlimited power when he was elected to the office of Archon. Solon decided to write dictates designed to solve the political problems plaguing the city. Solon's dictates were inscribed on wooden plaques that were hung up for the citizens to read. Solon repealed all the laws (except those concerning homicide).

Before Solon's reforms, Athens was administered by nine Archons, who were elected or appointed. There was also an assembly of commoners (the *ekklesia*). However, there was no representative body for the lowest class of citizens (the Thetes). Solon altered the rules for the *ekklesia*, allowing all male citizens to be allowed into it, with court magistrates and juries drawn from the same pool of males. This could be considered as an early version of the Republic form of government, in which citizens have a role in the creation of laws and the means to hold elected leaders accountable.

To guide such a large governing body, Solon also created the Council of Four Hundred. For this, each of the four Athenian tribes put forward one hundred members to serve on the Council. Solon also made alterations to the organization of Athens' military by stratifying the roles and delineating who could serve in them according to their family wealth or property.

Solon also reformed the economic laws and culture of Athens. Fathers were encouraged to find trades or suitable economic roles for their sons. Otherwise, the sons would not be required to support their fathers in old age. Foreign craftsmen and merchants were encouraged to move to Athens with their families and were granted citizenship. The cultivation of olives and the production of olive-based products was supported, and the export of all other produce was prohibited. Solon also propagated laws regarding some forms of slavery: annulling all contracts based on personal servitude, banning debt-based slavery, and releasing all Athenian citizens from all forms of slavery. Furthermore, Solon also passed several other social reforms to improve Athenian life.

Once his rules were disseminated, and he saw they were working, Solon left Athens for ten years, travelling the various territories of the Eastern Mediterranean. The reforms did not last long, however, as the old ways were challenging to give up. Within four years, some elected officials refused to stand down once their terms were up, while other important posts sometimes remained empty. Eventually, a relative of Solon, Peisistratus, seized power as a tyrant ruling over Athens. Upon returning after his ten years, Solon regarded the Athenians as foolish for allowing this to happen.

After Peisistratus died in 527 BC, his son, Hippias, became a tyrant. Hippias was cruel to the citizens of Athens. He levied crushing taxes on the poor and executed large numbers of people. This caused immense hostility towards his rule, and he began looking abroad for allies, first in Persia and then in Lampsakos. Other Athenian families, concerned about any relationship with Persia, sought to overthrow Hippias. Eventually, he was ousted by a Spartan military campaign in 510 BC and banished from Athens along with his family. Hippias and his family joined the Achaemenid Empire.

Following the expulsion of Hippias, democracy was brought back through the reforms of Cleisthenes, during 508 BC. His first change altered the political boundaries of Athens, broadening them to contain the entire region of Attica, and regarding all the free people there as citizens. Further changes were made in 462 BC by Ephialtes, which significantly reduced the power of the existing

leadership body, turning it solely into a court for the trying of deliberate homicide. In the fourth century BC, the leadership body was again modified, adding responsibility for investigating corruption among officials.

By the fourth century BC, Athenian democracy had reached its maturity. Like today, some Athenians were more politically active or ambitious than others. The governing bodies of the city were complex, multi-faceted, and involved a 'checks-and-balances' system to ensure stability. To vote, one had to be an adult, male citizen. Aside from participation in politics, being male certainly gave ancient Grecians many more rights and abilities. Something that was also demonstrated in the ancient Olympic games.

Chapter 3 – Olympic Origins

In addition to benefiting from the wisdom of Greek democracy, Ancient Greece also offered a gift to future generations through the Olympic games.

Some historians believe the Olympics date back to 10th or 9th century BC. However, it is most likely the first Olympic games took place in 776 BC in Olympia (named for Mt. Olympus, the home of the Greek Gods and Goddesses). It is unclear who invented the games. Mythology says Zeus, who was the father of the other Greek Gods and Goddesses, instituted the games to commemorate his battle with Kronos. Some attribute the founding to Heracles (Hercules, a demi-God).

At the time, the Olympic games were part of a religious festival intended to honour Zeus. They were also a time for a truce and good relations between the Greek cities. Men from all over Greece (including Spain and Turkey, which were subsumed under Greece at that time) would arrive at that Sanctuary of Zeus in Olympia, to represent their city-states by showing their physical prowess and skill. They would enter through the Portico of Echo and perform in an ancient stadium.

During the first Olympic games, there may have been only one significant event—a stadium race around a 600-foot-long track. During the first Olympic showing, a cook from Elis, named Koroibos, won that contest. Records indicate this singular athletic event may have constituted the Olympic games for the next 13 Olympic festivals (until 724 BC, with the Olympics happening only every four years). In contrast to today's medals, during the ancient Olympic games, winners were recognized with olive wreaths.

Starting in 720 BC, the games expanded by adding other events. Some also believe in that year the practice of nudity during the games became common. However, it is not clear when this tradition started, who instituted it, or why it was done. It is most likely it did become standard practice by the late 8th century BC. Early on, all Olympic events were held on just one day, but as events were added, they extended it to five days.

When events were added, running was divided into three events: the stage (a test of speed ran the length of the stadium), the diaulos (two lengths of the stadium), and the dolichos (20 lengths of the stadium). Wrestling was used to represent military combat without weapons. Boxers hands were protected

with leather. Some combatants even added metal to the hand joints, to make the punches more painful. Pankration was an ancient form of martial arts that combined elements of wrestling and boxing. The equestrian competitions were played in the Hippodrome, rather than the stadium and the winner was the owner of the horse, not the rider himself. The pentathlon was comprised of five events: wrestling, javelin, long jump, running, and discuss. There were also boys' events, including boxing, wrestling, and running.

Some of the best champions from the Olympics were heralded in historical records. Often statues were made in their likeness and placed in their hometowns. There was Astylos of Kroton, who won six olive wreaths over the course of multiple Olympics. His victories were met with some challenges. In his first games, he represented Kroton. Later, he represented Syracuse, and the Krotons punished him by destroying his statue.

Milon, also from Kroton, had brains and brawn. He studied under Pythagoras (ancient Greek geometrician). He won six times for wrestling, at the Olympics. He also won seven times in the Pythian Games, ten times in the Isthmian Games, and nine times in the Nemean Games. He was certainly one of Greece's most celebrated athletes.

Leonidas of Rhodes also won numerous victories. He, in fact, won three separate events at four consecutive Olympics. Melankomas of Karia was celebrated for his talents in boxing. He was light and quick, usually defeating an opponent without being hit or hitting them. He would fight by holding his arms out and dodging their blows until they became too exhausted to fight.

Although women were not permitted to participate in the ancient Olympics, Kyniska of Sparta (daughter of King Archidamus), still found a way to win. She was the first woman to be listed as an Olympic victor when her chariot won in races during the 96th and 97th Olympics. At the time, victories were awarded to the owner of the chariot and horse, not the actual rider. Sadly, her stealthy victory took recognition from the rider.

Although many associate marathon running with the ancient Olympics, the first marathon did not occur during Ancient times. This practice was instituted during the modern Olympics. It was done to commemorate the run of Pheidippides, who carried news from Marathon to Athens (approximately 26 miles) during 490 BC. An event that is entirely separate from the Olympic games.

Later still, after conquering Greece, the Romans also joined the Olympic

games. The ancient Olympic games occurred until AD 393. It is believed Emperor Theodosius I, decided the games were representative of pagan cults, and he had them abolished. Olympia was then attacked by vandalism. Earthquakes and floods also damaged it. The area eventually disappeared. It was rediscovered in 1766 by Englishman Richard Chandler. However, it was only in 1875 that archaeological digs found Olympic ruins.

The games returned in 1896; 1503 years after the final ancient Olympic game. A Frenchman, Baron Pierre de Coubertin initiated the idea of holding modern Olympic games. Although he initially wanted the games to be held in Paris, after some planning and organizing, it was decided the first modern Olympics would be held in Athens, Greece. The Olympics now occur every two years, alternating between Summer and Winter games, and in different locations around the world.

One central tradition of the modern Olympics is the passing of the Olympic torch and the lighting of the Olympic flame. This idea of an Olympic flame was first used in 1928 during the Amsterdam games. The first torch relay occurred in the 1936 Berlin games. Torch relays were not explicitly used in the ancient Olympic games. However, they were often used in other Greek athletic festivals, including some held in Athens.

Although the ancient Olympic games were a time of truce when people came together to show their athletic skill. There were still tensions among people as cities and states used the opportunity to prove the superiority of their region. Moreover, those truces were confined to the period of each game, and there were still plenty of wars occurring in the years between games that continued to reshape Greece and grow its history forward.

Chapter 4 – Greece Grows from War to War

Even while the Olympics were occurring every four years, conflict brewed among the Greeks. The primary conflict was the Messenian wars of which there were three. It is not entirely clear when the first occurred because three historians give separate and differing accounts. They each use a different measure or calendar system. Most modern historians believe the first Messenian War likely started in 757 BC.

The precipitating events for the first Messenian War date back to approximately 400 years before. Sometime around the year 1100 BC, the Heracleidae returned to the Peloponnesus to reclaim their birth right. The Heracleidae are supposedly the direct descendants of Hercules and are, ethnically and linguistically, Dorian Greeks. These peoples conquered or supplanted the leadership of various cities and regions within the Peloponnesus. This resulted in changes to the ethnic mix of the entire Greek mainland.

Doric groups spread throughout the southern two-thirds of the Peloponnesus and the cities of Epirus; Achaeans occupied the northern portions of the Peloponnesus; Ionians occupied Attica, southern Thrace and Macedonia, various Aegean Islands, and the lands that would eventually become Ionia in Asia Minor; and Aeolians occupied Thebes and the cities of Thessaly. Conflict arose sporadically between the rulers of these cities and regions, mainly since many of the citizens were not of the same ethnic group as the rulers. These divisions. both internally and externally continued to impact Greece all the way through to the Peloponnesian War.

A distal cause of the First Messenian War involved the lineage and culture of the Kings of Messenia. The Messenians, most of whom were Achaean, were initially accepting of their new Dorian overlord, Cresphontes after he married Merope (the daughter of King Cypselus of Arcadia, who was Achaean). At some point, Cresphontes and Merope surrendered some land to a group of Dorians, forming a Dorian enclave within Messenia.

The subjects of Messenia revolted, killing Cresphontes and all but one of his children, Aepytus, who was being educated in Arcadia at the time. Once Aepytus reached adulthood, he was installed as King of Messenia by the various other Dorian monarchs in the Peloponnesus. This would later

backfire on them, however, as Aepytus began a program of systematically wiping out the Dorian culture in Messenia and replacing it with his adopted Achaean culture. This enraged the Dorian subjects within Messenia and the Dorian kings who installed him to his throne.

The most proximate cause of the First Messenian War was a case of cattle rustling. Polychares of Messenia, who was an Olympic athlete, leased some grazing land from Euaiphnos of Spartan. Euaiphnos then stole the cattle and sold them, claiming raiders had ambushed the land and taken them. Polychares initially believed the explanation, but a herdsman of Polychares returned and explained what Euaiphnos had done.

Polychares was willing to let the cattle go, but Euaiphnos offered to take Polychares' son with him to pick up the money from the merchants. However, once out of Messenia, Euaiphnos killed Polychares' son. Polychares requested justice from Spartan magistrates. Justice was delayed, so Polychares decided to begin killing every Spartan he could find. After several murders, the Spartans demanded the extradition of Polychares to Sparta to stand trial. Rulers in Messenia were willing but wanted Euaiphnos in exchange.

By now, a simple case of the theft and sale of cattle had grown to involve the kings of Sparta and Messenia. Sparta dispatched a group of magistrates to Messenia to argue for the extradition of Polychares. At that time, two men ruled Messenia: Antiochus and Androcles (both were direct descendants of Aepytus). Androcles supported extraditing Polychares, while Antiochus was against it entirely.

At some point, the arguments between the rulers and the Spartan delegation boiled over, and both sides drew weapons. At the end of the fight, Androcles lay dead. Antiochus managed to calm the situation, wishing to turn the argument over to neutral arbitration (courts at Argos and Athens). None of that would happen, as Antiochus would be dead within three months, with his son Euphues succeeding him as sole King of Messenia. Shortly after his ascension, Sparta launched an invasion of Messenia.

For the first four years of the war, there was no progress by either side. In the fifth year, there was a tremendous battle near Ampheia. It was concluded indecisively, but with substantial losses on both sides. Not wanting to face such losses in the future, the Messenians fell back to a fortress at Mount Ithome. Around this time, a devastating plague struck Messenia, killing thousands of people. Distressed by mounting battlefield losses and losses at

home to the plague, King Euphues sent a messenger to the Oracle at Delphi seeking advice on how to confront the Spartan threat. The Oracle instructed him to sacrifice a royal virgin, which they did. The Spartans, hearing of the Oracle's advice and the actions of the Messenians, withdrew for six years.

The war continued to wage on for years. This was a time where wars were fought in small segments between seasons and farm work. It severely restricted the time in which wars could be fought. This caused wars to last years or decades; even if the fighting could have been otherwise condensed and concluded within a few years. Though during the Messenian wars, the Greeks did advance their techniques with hoplites (career military soldiers), which made later combats more efficient.

In the 18th year of the war, several other Greek cities joined the conflict: Corinth joined with Sparta, while Arcadia and Sikyon joined with Messenia. For a short time, the tide turned in favour of the Messenians with the defeat of the Laconians, who had sided with Sparta. At some point, King Aristodemos of Messenia had a dream in which his daughter (who had been sacrificed at the suggestion of the Oracle of Delphi, appeared, and showed him her wounds). He awoke, went to her tomb, and killed himself. In the chaos that followed, the Messenians abandoned Mount Ithome, and the Spartans burned it to the ground. At this victory, the Spartans subjugated all of Messenia, reducing the remaining population to the status of helots (enslaved people), and with that, the war was over.

The Second and Third Messenian Wars each had their roots in the ashes of the first war: helot discontent. Both were widespread helot rebellions, first in 685 BC and then again in 464 BC. The first rebellion was concentrated within Messenia, where the local helots overthrew their overlords and, with the support of Argos, invaded Laconia. The initial invasion was successful, with the Messenians defeating the Spartans at the Battle of Deres. The Messenian leader of the battle, Aristomenes, was elevated by his soldiers into a king-like figure for Messenia; sharing lineage with Aepytus further cemented this.

Feeling particularly brave, or fool-hardy, Aristomenes snuck into Sparta and placed a shattered Spartan shield in the Temple of Athena to frighten the Spartans. It worked. The Spartans immediately sent for the wisdom of the Oracle at Delphi, who told them something they did not want to hear—they would need a leader from Athens to lead their armies to victory. The Spartans eventually, after suffering other battlefield losses, swallowed their collective

pride to request help from Athens.

Athens sent them Tyrtaeus, who was lame (missing a leg), nearly blind, and a poet, not a military commander. Apparently, his poetry was uncommonly good, as after joining the Spartan army, the war turned in Sparta's favour, eventually trapping the Messenians in a fortress at Mount Ira. During a raid on a Spartan supply line, Aristomenes was captured.

Using the swiftness and guile that allowed him to sneak into Sparta, Aristomenes was able to slip his bonds and escape the Spartans before he could be executed, making it back to Mount Ira. The Messenians held off the Spartans for nearly a decade before surrendering. The Spartans allowed the women, children, and even Aristomenes to leave, telling those who stayed they would either die or be reduced to helot status again. Many left for Italy, settling a city at Messina. This was the end of the second war.

The Third Messenian War was a broader conflict, involving several different peoples who were subjugated as helots by Sparta. The war started in response to a devastating earthquake that struck Sparta in 464 BC. Modern analysis of the area suggests the quake had a surface wave magnitude of 7.6, which made it one of the strongest recorded earthquakes in all of antiquity. Scholars of the period put the immediate death toll between 10 and 20 thousand people. In its aftermath, the Laconians, Messenians, Thourians, and Aithaians all rebelled against Sparta. The revolt was so great the leaders of Sparta asked the other Greek city-states for assistance.

Most cities, including Athens, sent military delegations. However, Sparta concerned the Athenians had ulterior motives and would eventually turn against Sparta in support of the helots, dismissed the Athenian contingent. This infuriated the Athenians. They broke their alliance with Sparta and started building their own system of alliances. The rebellions were eventually put down, with the survivors fleeing to Athens, and then settling near Corinth. This location is important, as it is near the only land-bridge connecting Attica and the Peloponnesus. The Third Messenian War ended in 459 BC, and yet, more wars were soon to be fought. Wars that threatened the entire Greek way of life.

Chapter 5 – The Fight for Democracy

Although Greece was growing in many ways outside of politics, they soon faced a threat to their political system and general way of life through the war with the Persians. The wars between the Greek city-states and the Persians (technically the Achaemenid Empire), was one of the great deciding events of the ancient world; specifically, it would determine whether the region of Greece would be ruled under their favoured democracy or whether they would be taken over by an autocracy. Had Persia conquered or subjugated the Greeks, their traditions of democratic governance may have been lost forever.

Going up against the Persians was formidable. The Achaemenid Empire stretched from the Indus River valley, north into the Caucasus Mountains, the northern shores of the Black Sea, and west into Libya. At its height, the Persians controlled over two million square miles of land and had a population of between 15 and 30 million people. Before their conflict with the Greeks, the Achaemenid Empire had conquered the Neo-Babylonian Empire and the Egyptian Empire, neither of which was an easy task. Although outnumbered, the Greeks were fighting a defensive war in which they were intimately familiar with the lands and seas around them. It was with these advantages, along with Greek courage, that would eventually turn the wars in their favour.

The wars began, not in Greece-proper, but in Asia Minor, along the western coast of Anatolia; specifically, in Ionia. The cities there were populated by Greek settlers from the Ionian tribal group, and these settlers had much in common with the people in Athens. Twelve cities were founded: Miletus, Myus, Priene, Ephesus, Colophon, Lebedos, Teos, Klazomenae, Phocaea, Erythrae, the island of Samos, and the island of Chios. These cities were culturally and economically connected, but remained politically independent from one another and from the Greek mainland, until approximately 560 BC. In that year these Grecian cities were conquered by the Lydians. Sometime around 547 BC, the Achaemenid Empire conquered Lydia, and with it, these Greek cities.

Unlike in other portions of the Empire, where the Persians could find local elites to help with ruling the region, there was little help to be found in Ionia, because of their democratic and independent heritage. The Empire then

decided to promote individual tyrants to rule each of the cities, which even still did not work out well.

In 499 BC, the tyrant of Miletus, Aristagoras, set sail on an expedition to conquer the island of Naxos. It was a catastrophic failure, which led Persian plans for his dismissal. Aristagoras, not wanting to be deposed, raised up the entirety of Greek Anatolia into rebellion against the Persians. This was the Ionian Revolt, which lasted until 493 BC.

The rebellion was not contained to the coastline; it drew more regions of Asia Minor into the conflict. Aristagoras, being Ionian and having cultural and religious ties to Athens, also garnered military support from Athens and nearby Eretria. In 498 BC, the combined forces of Ionia, Athens, and Eretria burned the Persian regional capital of Sardis to the ground. The Persian king, Darius the Great, boiled over in anger and vowed to have revenge on Athens, Eretria, and Ionia for this. The revolt continued until 494 BC when the Persians could mount a significant enough military and attack the city of Miletus. At the Battle of Lade, the Ionians were crushed, and the rebellion was over. The last vestiges of it were wiped out within a year.

Seeking to secure the western Asia Minor from further revolts, and from the meddling of the mainland, King Darius embarked on a plan to conquer Greece, which launched more fighting between Greece and Persia. The first Persian invasion of Greece began in 492 BC, with the Persian general Mardonius marching north through Thrace and Macedon and conquering those regions. He was stopped by a storm, which destroyed his fleet near Mount Athos, crippling his supply lines. Mardonius was then wounded in an attack by a Thracian tribe and was forced to retreat to Asia Minor.

In 490 BC, King Darius sent emissaries to all the major cities of Greece demanding their submission, or else face destruction. Most cities relented, except for Athens and Sparta, which executed the emissaries upon arrival. A second, larger force was dispatched, led by two commanders: Datis and Artaphernes. This army subjugated the Cyclades (a group of islands in the south-central Aegean). Next, the army moved against Eretria, laying siege to it for six days. The city was betrayed by two members of its ruling elite, who opened the city gate to the Persians. The army razed Eretria and enslaved those it did not kill. While marching towards Athens, the Persian force was decisively defeated at the Battle of Marathon, which put a temporary hold on Darius' ambitions.

Darius' rage burned brighter than ever, and he began to plan to completely conquer Greece. Before he could carry out his plans, he died in 486 BC. Unfortunately, his revenge-fueled rage did not die with him. His son Xerxes personally conquered Greece. In 480 BC, Xerxes led the second invasion of Greece with one of the largest ancient armies ever assembled. Historian Herodotus put the size of the Persia army at 2.5 million men. For comparison: when The Nazis invaded the Soviet Union during Operation Barbarossa they had approximately 3.8 million men. Most modern historians believe Herodotus greatly exaggerated the size of the army, instead estimating the size of the force at around 250,000 men. We cannot examine Persian accounts of the invasion because there are none; no Persian records of any of the attacks of Greece exists.

The Battle of Thermopylae consisted of just a few thousand Greeks against the Persian army (including their famous Immortals— a popular and well-renowned Persian military unit). The Greeks were betrayed by a local who showed the Persians a mountain pass through which they could flank the Greek army. Leonidas of Sparta dismissed most of the Greek army, but he remained behind with 2,000 soldiers to delay the Persian advance. The eventual Persian victory allowed them to march on Athens and set it ablaze, as well as overrun most of Attica. However, the Persians were again defeated at sea, during the Battle of Salamis, which crippled their supply lines. The next year, a united Greece went on the offensive, ultimately defeating the Persians at the Battle of Plataea, and ultimately ending the invasion of Greece.

Following the success at Plataea, the remaining portions of the Persian fleet were destroyed at the Battle of Mycale. In the North, the Persian garrisons Sestos and Byzantium were expelled, pushing the Persians back across the Bosporus (waterway located in modern-day Turkey). Due to the actions of the Spartan general, Pausanias, at Byzantium (which included releasing Persian prisoners who were his friends or relatives of King Xerxes), the anti-Persian alliance was reconstituted around Athenian leadership.

This group came to be known as the Delian League. They continued the campaign against Persia for the next 30 years. At the Battle of the Eurymedon, in Asia Minor, the Delian League won a decisive victory that secured freedom for the cities in Ionia. The League, not content with fighting Persia directly, helped also to incite a revolt in Egypt, which ended disastrously for the Egyptians and the Delian League. Following this error,

further fighting against Persia was halted. The last of the fighting occurred when the Greeks sent a fleet to Cyprus in 451 BC but achieved few gains.

This series of battles came to be known as The Persian Wars. It was long, and many lives were lost, but as the Greeks won, and so did democracy. Their democratic way of life was safe once again, for at least the time being.

Chapter 6 – The Peloponnesian War

The threats of the Persian Empire had represented a threat to Greek independence, and by extension, the future of governance through democracy. Likewise, the Peloponnesian War threatened the Greek political system, by ending the polis system of governance.

In the 50 years between The Persian Wars and The Peloponnesian War, the cities of Athens and Sparta were considered ‘first among equals’ among the rest of the Greek city-states. However, human nature being what it is, envy, greed, and fear eventually caused a rivalry to spread. Thucydides, who was present for the conflicts and who wrote a masterful history of the period, believed the eventual war was started by Sparta. He supposed Sparta began to feel trapped by the burgeoning Athenian power. Athens and Sparta were both powerful arenas, especially after the successful conflicts against Persia. At the time, they were both run by Leagues (loose-alliances that were headed by a dominant city-state). Athens had its Delian League, and Sparta had its Peloponnesian League. Unfortunately, the two leagues were the beginning of the end for the Greek polis system.

Originally the Delian League was meant to provide the organizational structure to fight against the Persians; however, Athens began to use the League's navy for its own purposes. Further, minor city-states, in the Delian League, practiced their traditional form of democratic governance, but Athens made the major decisions. This did not sit well with the other members of the League, sparking a variety of minor conflicts. Athens had the powerful and expansive navy, along with other alliances at its disposal, which it continued to grow and develop in case Persia should return.

The Peloponnesian League was organized under more broadly democratic terms, with two council-bodies and with all the member city-states having a vote in one of the councils. Sparta held the most sway, being the only city able to call everyone together, and all the other city-states were made to have alliances with Sparta. They could also have alliances with each other, but they were not required to. Sparta also had an advantage over the other cities in that it could field a standing army of hoplite infantry (citizen soldiers), who were not bound to farmers' fields like the militaries of other city-states would have been. Also, Sparta could call up an additional two hundred

thousand soldiers (Helots) from their allies and their own population.

The war between these two powerful forces began with Athens inserting itself into a conflict between Megara and Corinth, both of which were allies of Sparta. Athens was able to secure an alliance with Megara, which gave the Delian League a foothold on the Isthmus of Corinth, with which they could isolate the rest of the Peloponnesus.

Sparta was soon pulled into the conflict, which quickly widened into a greater war. This war is not what many consider the Peloponnesian War, but it functions in much the same way that World War I was the prelude to World War II. Eventually, peace would be found, but peace would be short-lived, and tempers would only smoulder.

This prelude conflict began in 459 BC, with the war between Megara and Corinth, and concluded in early 445 BC. Athens was unprepared for the conflict, and faced with a massive Spartan invasion of Attica; they were willing to accept Sparta's terms: cede lands and allies on the mainland. Both Athens and Sparta were still in control of their respective leagues and alliances. The peaceful resolution lasted only fifteen years.

The provocation that sparked the Peloponnesian War, once again, came down to Athens' relationship with Megara. In approximately 432 BC, following further problems with both Corinth and Megara (which was an ally of Sparta at this time), Athens enacted a trade embargo against the citizens of Megara. This embargo was disastrous for Megara's economy. At the request of Corinth, Sparta called together all members of the Peloponnesian League to Sparta to discuss what to do about the situation. Many of the city-states had grievances against Athens, aside from what was being done to Megara; the assembly voted, and a majority found Athens in violation of the peace. This meant war.

The Peloponnesian League, except for Corinth, were land-based powers which could field mighty armies. Just like the first conflict, Sparta and its allies invaded Attica and drove the Athenians from the countryside. Wisely, the Athens did not try and fight Sparta's vastly more superior force, and instead retreated behind its thick walls.

Furthermore, Athens still held its port and was supported by its more-than-capable navy. The Athenian leader, Pericles, had a plan: rely on the navy to ensure the increased importation of food and material into Athens, while also sending the fleet out to stabilize its coastal allies and prevent infiltrations

from Sparta and its allies, all while avoiding major land engagements at any costs.

Sparta relied on a strategy of stealing crops and burning what they could not carry. While this kept their bellies full, the Spartans were unsuccessful in drawing out the Athenian army nor driving the city into capitulation. What eventually tipped the stand-off in the Spartans' favour was an outbreak of plague within the city, which killed Pericles and one-fourth of the citizens. This had given the Spartans the upper hand in the conflict.

However, even though death and disease in that battle, the Athenians were not deterred. With their refusal to surrender, both sides looked to secondary objectives throughout the Aegean, Asia Minor, and Sicily. Also, Sparta sought to turn members of the Delian League, and Athens sowed discord among the Spartan Helots.

In these subsequent conflicts, Athens used its allies' hoplites (citizen soldiers) in maritime operations, while Sparta spent time building a navy. Ultimately, during the Peloponnesian War, there were no more than a few pitched battles among vast armies. This represented a difference from how wars were fought previously, and it resulted in vast swathes of destruction, but no real change for the broader course of the conflict.

The Athenian strategy yielded some gains, primarily with the capture of Pylos in 425 BC. The Spartans, who were defending the city, were captured and there was a brief insurrection among the Helots. Not content with just capturing their enemies, Athens began to attack neutral city-states around the Aegean. This foolish decision was not the last one they made, as the Athenians also embarked on an expedition to Sicily to aid one of their allies against one of Sparta's allies. This resulted in the loss of more than 40 thousand Athenians dying in the fields of Sicily, a thousand miles away from Athens.

Sparta also established a permanent base of operations in Attica at Decelea. This was to further destabilize Athens' allies by encouraging army desertions and disrupting their economies. After the terrible plague and the disastrous foray into Sicily, Athens was unable to replace their manpower losses and soon found both their army and navy routinely outnumbered. Persia, sensing an opportunity to make inroads amongst its enemies, also subsidized Sparta, and its allies.

The Athenians finally faced defeat at a naval confrontation off Aegospotami.

Sparta had won. The Long Walls, which were the lifeblood that connected Athens and its port, were burned to the ground. A Spartan force now occupied the city.

Thirty years of fighting in the Aegean, Attica, Peloponnesus, and Sicily left Athens impoverished, demoralized, and depleted. However, it was a poor outcome for both sides. Sparta and its allies were not in any position to maintain a long-term, overarching hold over all of Greece.

The Peloponnesian War had brought an end to the polis system. It had also moved armies away from the traditional way of fighting wars, where farmer-soldiers balanced their time between the battlefields and the wheat fields. Warfare now meant broad conflicts involving naval invasions, long sieges, and scorched earth approaches. Greece was wounded, and soon an invader from the North would change everything once more.

Chapter 7 – Enter Alexander the Great

North of ancient Greece proper lay the Greek kingdom of Macedon. There, Philip II ruled as king. He took a wounded Greece and attempted, through politics and force, to repair it.

In 356 BC, Philip II had a son—Alexander. His birth was marked by legendary tales. Reportedly, before her pregnancy, his mother dreamed her womb was struck by a thunderbolt. His father also dreamed he sealed her womb with a seal containing the image of a lion. Some believed Alexander's actual father was the Greek god Zeus.

It was later said that on the day of Alexander's birth, Philip's army won a battle, his horses won in the Olympic games, and the Temple of Artemis all burned. Some believed the temple burned because Artemis was not there, instead of attending Alexander's birth. Historians now believe these legends were promoted to indicate to the people of Macedon that Alexander was superhuman and destined for greatness from birth.

As a youth, Alexander was raised by a nurse and tutored. He learned to read, ride horses, hunt, and play the lire. As he moved into his teenage years, his father sought a tutor for Alexander's advanced studies. It was arranged for Aristotle to teach Alexander, along with the children of other Macedonian nobles. Many of his fellow students became Alexander's friends and later his generals. Together they learned a wide variety of topics.

Beginning at age 16, Alexander moved from the role of student to the position of regent and heir apparent for his father. He ran the kingdom while his father led troops on the battlefield. Alexander quickly responded to threats on the home-front. He colonized an area and named it Alexandroupolis. As Philip and Alexander worked together, they became increasingly involved in Greek affairs. They were a formidable team. Soon, they established a Hellenic Alliance that included most of the Greek city-states aside from Sparta. Philip was then named as the "Supreme Commander" of this new league, now called the League of Corinth by modern scholars.

Philip soon made plans to further extend his reach by attacking the Persian Empire. However, he was also distracted from his mission by love. He entered a new marriage. The relationship posed a threat to Alexander. Any

children produced in the marriage could take precedence as Philip's heir. The situation started a feud between the once united father and son. Records suggest Philip even once tried to attack Alexander. Soon, Alexander fled from Macedon with his mother. He sought refuge. After a time, he learned that Philip had not intended to disown him. He returned to Macedon, but tensions continued between them, particularly over marriage arrangements.

In 336 BC, the captain of his bodyguards assassinated Philip. When Philip II died, Alexander immediately ascended to the throne. At approximately age 20, he now had charge over his own kingdom and a great army. Alexander quickly consolidated his power and further secured his reign by eliminating potential rivals. He ordered the deaths of several individuals who could have challenged his reign. Some city-states began to revolt against the reign of Alexander, but he quickly responded, using diplomacy. He soon also took on the title of "leader" (Hegemon), as Philip had.

When Alexander was given the role of generalship over Greece, he used his new position to continue extending his reach and the boundaries of his rule. He soon decided to resume his father's mission of conquering Persia. In 334 BC, he led the invasion of the Persian Empire. Records indicate he showed his intent to claim this land by throwing a spear into the soil and saying he accepted the territory as a gift from the gods.

It was the start of a series of campaigns that lasted approximately ten years. He conquered the ancient territories of Levant, Syria, Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia. Upon arrival at Persia, he stormed the Persian Gates. He went directly to the capital city of Persepolis, where his troops looted the city. He stayed there for five months. Then, a fire broke out in the city, which could not be stopped. Historians offer differing accounts as to Alexander's reaction to the loss. Some say he regretted it.

With little reason to stay in Persepolis, Alexander continued towards Media and Parthia. He claimed more lands, reporting the fallen leaders had named him successor to the Achaemenid throne. As he continued across Asia, Alexander established some cities bearing his name or some variation of his name. While he was leaving his mark, he also adopted elements of Persian dress and customs.

One custom that Alexander adopted was that of proskynesis, which was a show of respect to authority, comprised of a symbolic kiss on the hand or a prostration on the ground. The Greeks disliked this practice, believing

Alexander intended it to deify himself. Some followers began to lose respect for him and even abandoned him. Some men conceived a plot to assassinate him. When the plot was revealed, Alexander had several people executed and killed a few himself. A next assassination attempt was exposed as well, resulting in torture and death for the would-be assassins.

As Alexander continued his conquest in Asia, he left others in charge of Macedon. He sacked Thebes to keep Greece subdued during his absence. Alexander's assigned generals kept other uprisings at bay. For the most part, while Alexander campaigned in Asia, Greece had a period of peace and prosperity. He frequently sent back sums of money and loot, which strengthened the economy of Greece. The conquests also increased the reach of trade across the entire empire.

Each victory helped to further expand Alexander's empire. Alexander's hunger for more power and dominion led him to invade India through many more campaigns and battles. Eventually, his armies became exhausted, and they refused to continue any further East. Alexander agreed to start back toward Macedon. Along the way, there was more fighting and conquering. Many men died on the arduous trek.

When he arrived in Macedon, Alexander found the leaders he had appointed had not always done as he instructed. He was disappointed in their actions and executed some. As he continued with his troops on the trek, Alexander decided to allow over-age and disabled soldiers to retire. However, they misunderstood and mutinied. They refused to be sent back home. They criticized his actions. Alexander brought in Persian leadership, and his troops soon wanted to resolve the dispute. He agreed and held a grand banquet to improve relations between his various troops. Alexander and his troops then continued their travel.

As they travelled, Alexander found more disappointing actions from the leaders he left behind. A close friend, Hephaestion, also soon died. Historians believe the death could have been the result of poisoning. Historians also believe Hephaestion could have been Alexander's lover. He was devastated by the loss and called for public mourning

Always seeking his next conquest, Alexander set out plans to invade Arabia. Alexander had the plans; however, like his father, he died before he would see them realized. On June 10 or 11 323 BC, Alexander died at age 32. His death occurred in Babylon at the palace of Nebuchadnezzar II. Historians

disagree on the cause of his death. Some records suggest he got a fever that worsened until he died. Other records indicate he drank a bowl of unmixed wine and became ill, dying 11 days later. Some records suggest the death was due to poisoning. Modern historians continue to debate whether the death could have been due to poisoning or some other illness.

Alexander was interred in a gold sarcophagus filled with honey that was then placed in a gold casket. A seer had predicted that wherever Alexander was buried would see prosperity. Factions of people fought over where Alexander would be buried, with people even attempting to steal the sarcophagus. Later, the encasing was changed to glass so the gold could be used for coins. Records indicate others visited and took things from the tomb. For example, Caligula is reported to have taken Alexander's breastplate for his use. Eventually, the tomb was closed from the public. In time, the outcome for Alexander's remains and the location for his burial place were lost.

After Alexander's death, it was unclear who his heir would be. There were mixed reports for whether he had named anyone and if he had, who. Several states were ruled by his various surviving heirs and generals. Some attempted to retain order, but there were infighting and more assassinations. Claims for power and civil wars soon broke apart the empire Alexander had created. Eventually, a lack of clear leadership caused Macedonian unity to collapse. The Hellenistic world separated into these regions: Ptolemaic Egypt, Seleucid Mesopotamia and Central Asia, Attalid Anatolia, and Antigonid Macedon.

In addition to a lack of leadership, Alexander's need for more troops during his numerous conquests and campaigns had also depleted the manpower of Macedon. The divided and weakened region was unable to adequately defend itself from later attack. Ultimately, Macedon (along with Greece) became subjugated by Rome.

Despite his death and the disruption of his empire, Alexander left his mark across the world. His conquests had spread Greek culture, leaving it entwined with the customs of far-away places. This influence created a period called the Hellenistic period. Alexander settled many colonies that comprised a more magnificent Hellenistic civilization, and the influence remained years after his death.

Overall, his actions made Alexander famous as a legendary hero. In ancient times others sought to emulate him. Now, not only does his name mark approximately 20 cities such as Alexandria and Nicaea (now Punjab), but he

is also featured heavily in Grecian history and myths. Further, his incredible success at military pursuits made him a measure for other military leaders to compare themselves. Therefore, his military tactics also live on long after his death.

Given his success and impact, he became known as Alexander the Great. Indeed, his influence on Greek history was significant. He is considered one of the most influential people in world history. Alexander the Great is not the only important Grecian figure to have a big effect on Greek history and leave their mark on the rest of the world.

Chapter 8 – Great Minds of Ancient Greece

While wars waged around them, some ancient Greeks chose not to become Kings or Warriors. Instead, they elected to use their minds to advance Greek culture, making discoveries, and writing works that are still relevant today.

In the world of literature and theatre, Greek poets and playwrights created significant works. One, Aeschylus, is considered "the father of tragedy," named as such because that genre mainly began with his plays. Aeschylus also changed the way plays were constructed. He wrote scripts with more characters, which allowed for more complex conflict among them. Sadly, although records indicate he wrote approximately 90 plays, only seven have survived. Even among those, some question the authorship, as to whether Aeschylus wrote them or another playwright.

Other celebrated playwrights of the time included Sophocles and Euripides. Both also wrote in the tragedy genre. Records suggest Sophocles wrote at least 120 plays, but like Aeschylus, only seven survive. His style included even more well-developed characters. Euripides likely wrote 92 plays. Like his colleagues, just some survive and among those the authorship is debated. Euripides enjoyed slightly more popularity during his time, and he also used his status to advance other theatrical innovations. For example, he started representing mythical heroes as more ordinary people. This allowed him to explore the inner life and motives of his characters. It also allowed for more romance and comedy, which expanded play genres and made the theatre more complex.

In the related world of poetry, many poets wrote great works during ancient Greece. Perhaps most famous among these was, Pindar. He was considered "by far the greatest, in virtue of his inspired magnificence, the beauty of his thoughts and figures, the rich exuberance of his language and matter, and his rolling flood of eloquence." Today, his poetry may seem peculiar to modern readers, but it was characteristic of the time.

In the world of art, artists were creating great works. Perhaps most renowned among these was Phidias. He was a painter, sculptor, and architect who advanced Classical Greek designs. Legend tells of a great statue of Zeus at Olympia that he made. It is known as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. He also made his marks at the Athenian Acropolis, with

sculptures of the goddess Athena. Unfortunately, many of his great works were lost or destroyed. They have been best studied through replicas and the excavation of his workshop, which contained moulds for his bronze statues.

Greek mathematicians also had a long history of success. An early mark on the tradition was made by Euclid of Alexandria. He is considered the founder or father of geometry. He wrote a textbook, *Elements*, which was still used until the 20th century.

Archimedes was not only a mathematician, but he was also an astronomer, physicist, engineer, and inventor. Some consider him the greatest mathematician of all time. He provided many geometrical theorems, regarding the surface area, the area of a circle, and the volume of a sphere. He also offered an accurate approximation of Pi. He started applying math to phenomena in the physical world. His understanding of math allowed him to design inventions such as tools and machines.

Greek philosophy had a long history dating back to Thales of Miletus (who died in 546 BC). He may have, in fact, been the first philosopher and many regard him as the first to use a scientific philosophy. This meant he stepped away from the tradition of using mythology to explain the world and instead examined objects and phenomena through theories and hypotheses. Through this, he could recognize water was a vital substance that possibly played a role in much of nature.

The philosopher Leucippus continued to advance the study of nature during the 5th century BC. He was the first to believe everything might be composed of some invisible elements—a concept we know today as atoms. Most people are most familiar with the Greek Philosophers Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato. All three wrote on many topics and collectively their studies of philosophy significantly affected modern philosophical thought. Plato specifically founded the Academy in Athens, which was the first institution in the Western world for higher learning.

Hippocrates advanced the field of medicine in ancient Greece. His work earned him the title “father of medicine.” He founded the Hippocratic School of Medicine, establishing it as a discipline and a profession. He increased medical knowledge and prescribed proper practices for the physicians of ancient Greece. So much of what he did helped to build the medical field as it is today. For example, today’s doctors agree to a Hippocratic Oath, which he is credited with writing.

Finally, it is through the work of the Greek Historian, Herodotus, that so much of ancient Grecian history remains known today. He was a contemporary of other great minds such as Euripides and Socrates. He is considered “the father of history.” He pioneered new ways of recording history. He would systematically investigate events and then write them into a historiographic narrative. He wrote *The Histories* to document the origins of the Greco-Persian Wars. The work had a mostly biographical tone by recounting the lives of significant figures. He also recorded the circumstances of specific battles.

Chapter 9 – Roman Take-Over

Ancient Greece was a place of almost perpetual war within the borders of Greece and the surrounding territories. Some wars meant moving boundary lines and shifts in power. A few wars resulted in a real disruption to Greek independence.

More specifically, for many years, ancient Greece was under the rule of the Roman Empire. The Roman Republic's conquering of Greece was not done in a single sweep but instead was accomplished with small and steady steps of wars and disputes over territory and power. These resulted in a slow leeching of Grecian and Macedonian autonomy. Each war and power struggle tended to be limited in scope, resulting in few territorial changes, but they were cumulative. At the end of the process, the Roman Republic came to dominate Greece and the Hellenic portions of Asia Minor and the Levant.

The downfall of Greece and Macedonia started years earlier, separate even from the influence of Rome. The challenges began after the death of Alexander the Great. At that time, his empire was divided into a handful of successor empires, each led by one of his generals. By the time of Rome's involvement, only three of those empires remained: Ptolemaic Egypt, the Kingdom of Macedonia, and the Seleucid Empire.

Ptolemaic Egypt occupied Egypt as well as small portions of what is now the Middle East and bordering Carthage to the West. The Macedonian Kingdom was the smallest of the remaining successor states, occupying only Macedonia, in northern Greece, southern Thrace, and small portions of Asia Minor. The Seleucid Empire occupied Asia Minor, the Levant, and much of modern-day Iraq. Prominent also was the rising Parthian Empire, which occupied the lands of Iran, parts of Iraq, and reached almost to the Indus River.

A war between the Roman Republic and Macedonia did not begin as a conflict between them, but instead as part of a broader catastrophic war. In 218 BC, the Roman Republic declared war on Carthage after the latter conquered the city of Saguntum (a Roman ally). The fight involved many other territories some as allies and some as adversaries. This was not the first major war between Rome and Carthage, nor would it be the last.

During the Second Punic War, after the unusually brutal and catastrophic

Battle of Cannae, Philip V of Macedon felt the time was right to expand his realm at Rome's expense. To start this process, Macedonia joined the war on the side of Carthage, going against Rome with the goal of ultimately expanding their territory. However, this plan did not work, and in 214 BC Macedonia launched the First Macedonian War.

An attack on Oricum in Illyria was Macedonia’s first action of the War. Rome had already been concerned that Macedonia would enter the war and cause trouble for Italy, so a single legion and small fleet were prepared for the defence. The Roman leader in charge of the legion was Marcus Valerius Laevinus. When he received word that Oricum had fallen, he easily moved the fleet and legion to recapture it. He then ordered a sub-commander to take 2,000 men to relieve the siege of Apollonia. They snuck into the city under cover of night, and in the morning rushed out of the gates and attacked the unprepared Macedonians, causing them to retreat. It was seemingly a win for Rome.

Things would soon turn against the Roman allies as Macedonia captured more Illyrian cities: Atintania, Dimale, and Lissus (the last of which gave Philip access to the Adriatic Sea). Macedonia's fleet had been destroyed or trapped elsewhere by the Romans at this point, so they had to rely on Carthage to ferry troops to the Italian peninsula.

In the Summer of 211 BC, Rome and its allies (including Greece, all in opposition to Macedonia) staged a breakout, capturing several cities and regions. Further, Rome and its allies had brokered a deal: Rome would provide the bulk of naval support and superiority, while the Greeks would conduct most of the land battles; Rome would get the slaves, and the Greeks would get the territory.

Philip V of Macedon soon found himself spread too thin, receiving requests for help from too many places and too distant for him to help: the Achaean League in the Peloponnesus, Phocis Antikyra, Aegina, and allies in Asia Minor. In 210 BC things were going so well for Rome that when Laevinus returned to Rome (to take up his consulship), he reported that the Roman legion could be withdrawn. It was determined that just the fleet would remain to provide support for the Greek allies.

In a final effort, Philip invaded southern Greece, coming into contact against Aetolians, Spartans, and Pergamene troops at the two Battles of Lamia. Both battles resulted in Macedonian victories, but at considerable costs, as the

Aetolians, Spartans, and Pergamene troops merely fell back to well-fortified cities.

Five more years of hostilities continued, with both sides capturing and recapturing cities and regions. In 205 BC, the Romans re-entered the fray with over ten thousand troops, landing in Illyria. This, combined with Bithynia entering the conflict on Macedonia's side and several Greek city-states making separate peace treaties with Macedonia, meant a decisive outcome would be unlikely. A peace treaty was eventually signed, allowing Philip to have Illyria but forcing him to break his alliance with Carthage. Rome, secured now on their eastern borders and running out of allies in Greece, was satisfied. Although hostilities would erupt again during the third Punic War, which Rome again won.

War continued with the Second Macedonian War, which was significant for Greece. Like others, this war began because of a distant conflict. In Hellenic Egypt, King Ptolemy IV died in 204 BC, and his 6-year-old son Ptolemy V ascended the throne, though the realm was ruled via regents. During this transfer of power and transitional period, ancient divisions within Egyptian society spread through the country and erupted into a civil war, with Upper Egypt fighting against Lower Egypt.

Philip V (still ruling in Macedonia) and Antiochus the Great of the Seleucid Empire both looked to expand their respective realms during this period of Egyptian chaos. Philip invaded Thrace and Asia Minor; capturing Kios, Miletus, and several other independent cities. This territorial expansion worried some of the region's powers, especially the citizens and leaders in the kingdoms of Pergamon and Rhodes.

King Attalus I of Pergamon and Rhodes (territories in Greece) sent the Roman Republic a desperate plea for assistance. Rome had little interest in intervening in what they considered a strictly Greek matter. The Roman Senate did dispatch a small contingent of ambassadors to Athens to hear the Grecian concerns. Athens had recently declared war on Macedonia and Philip had responded by dispatching several thousand troops to Attica (the territory surrounding Athens).

The Roman ambassadors also met with the Macedonian general in charge of the Attica invasion force. The ambassadors delivered an ultimatum to withdraw from around Athens and leave the other Greek city-states in peace. The general of Macedonia did withdraw, but then Philip rejected the

ultimatum, re-launching the invasion, and laying siege to the city of Abydus near the Dardanelles.

In 200 BC, Rome delivered a second ultimatum to the Macedonians, demanding that Philip cease his offensive attacks against all Greek cities, against any Ptolemaic cities, and enter arbitration with Rhodes and the Kingdom of Pergamon. Philip, again, rejected the ultimatum. Rome responded by landing a legion in Illyria.

The Roman intervention went terribly. The first commander, Publius Sulpicius Galba, failed as a tactical and strategic commander. His successor, Publius Villius, had to deal with a rebellion among his troops. However, Titus Quinctius Flamininus would be the commander that Rome and Greece needed. Before his appointment, the Roman ultimatum was for Macedonia to stop attacking the Greek city-states in the South; Flamininus changed it saying that Philip should abandon all Greek and Ptolemaic conquests and confine himself to Macedonia proper to allow freedom for the Greeks. This change in policy won many allies among the city-states, Flamininus was able to drive Macedonia out of Attica and back into Thessaly.

Philip asked for peace, but Flamininus was in a precarious political situation that prevented him from giving in. Roman elections were approaching, and Flamininus wanted credit for a quick war in Greece. He also did not know if he would be recalled to Rome or if his command would be extended. He decided that if he were to be recalled, he would make peace with Macedonia; however, if his command persisted, he would continue the war. After much stalling and waiting, Flamininus received good news: his command would be extended, and his allies in the Senate supported prolonging the war.

When this news reached Greece, most of Macedonia's Greek allies abandoned the war effort, and Philip was left with no other option but to hire mercenaries to continue the fight. In June of 197 BC, at the Battle of Cynoscephalae, Philip, and his mercenaries were trounced. He again asked for peace on Rome's terms. Philip eventually relinquished all conquests in Greece, Thrace, and Asia Minor. Macedonia also had to pay a war indemnity to Rome and its allies, and surrender its navy. Rome then stationed contingents of soldiers in Corinth, Chalcis, and Demetrias that did not leave until 194 BC.

When the Second Macedonian War concluded, Antiochus the Great of the Seleucid Empire sought to achieve dominion over Greece as well as Egypt.

Simultaneously, Carthaginian General Hannibal Barca was advising Antiochus on military matters, and he wanted to reduce Rome to ashes. Antiochus decided to take a strategic route by manipulating a growing anti-Roman sentiment in Greece. His hope was the Greeks and Romans would fight one another, making it easier for both to be overtaken.

In 191 BC Antiochus decided to escalate again to war. He led an army across the Dardanelles. In response, Rome dispatched an army under the command of Manius Acilius Glabrio to crush Antiochus and his allies at the Battle of Thermopylae. After this crushing defeat, Antiochus found himself being chased across the Aegean Sea and back to Asia Minor. A combined Roman-Pergamon force then defeated the last army of the Seleucid Empire at the Battle of Magnesia in 190 BC. In the peace treaty, Antiochus had to pay nearly one million pounds of silver as a war indemnity, and surrender territories west of the Taurus Mountains, while Rhodes and the Kingdom of Pergamon would gain various regions in Asia Minor and Greece.

Following Philip V's death, the throne of Macedonia passed to his son, Perseus. He wanted to rebuild the kingdom, retaking the territories his father had lost, and eliminating the Roman influence in Greece. By this point, the politics of the various city-states, leagues, and kingdoms had become fractured among pro-Macedonian and pro-Roman factions. By 173 BC, Rome knew the war with Macedonia was once again on the horizon, but there was concern over who else would be dragged into the conflict. If the opponent numbers grew large, Rome's position would be threatened.

Eumenes II, King of Pergamon, made a speech in the Roman Senate in which he terrified the Senators and persuaded them that Perseus had both the means and will to invade Italy as well as to displace Rome from all of Greece. Envoys from Macedonia also spoke in front of the Senate, but it was too late, Rome was convinced Perseus had hostile intentions and that preparations for war were necessary.

The Third Macedonian War lasted for four years, and it tore apart the old alliances in Greece. At points, even Illyria and Pergamon turned against Rome. Even though the war waged for as long as it did, little ground was captured or lost for very long, due to a variety of alliances in the conflict.

There were two significant battles of consequence, Callinicus, and Pydna, that both turned the war in Rome's favour. In the first, during 171 BC, mixed armies from both sides, commanded respectively by Perseus of Macedon and

Roman Consul Licinius Crassus, met at Callinicus Hill in northern Thessaly. The battle went horribly for the Romans and their Pergamon allies. They lost almost three thousand soldiers while the Macedonian-Thracian force lost less than one hundred. Perseus withdrew before the conclusion of the battle, leaving an inconclusive finish to what could have been a rout of the enemy forces.

The second decisive battle (the Battle of Pydna) occurred in the final year of the war in 168 BC. This victory allowed Rome to have its vengeance. At that battle, Rome had a new Consul, Lucius Aemilius Paullus, who did not make the tactical blunders of some of his predecessors. Even though Perseus mustered a slightly larger army (43,000 total), he lost 31 thousand of his troops, and he was taken prisoner; comparatively, for the Romans, roughly one hundred soldiers were killed. The resulting peace treaty cemented Roman hegemony over much of Greece—divided Macedonia into four smaller, pro-Roman republics, and fostered the growth of pro-Roman factions all over Greece.

There was a Fourth Macedonian War, in which Andriscus of Macedon sought to re-establish the kingdom in Macedonia. This conflict was short and brutal. It resulted in the annexation of Macedonia as a province and the full assumption of Roman control over Greece. After Macedonia's defeat, the Aechaeans foolishly thought they could resist Roman control over the Peloponnesus. In response, Rome burned Corinth to the ground. With these victories and demonstrations of power, Rome was solidly in control of Greece. This began a period in which Greece was a part of the Roman Empire.

Chapter 10 – Cleopatra and her Consorts

Once Rome and the Italians had dominion over the region of Greece, it allowed for influence from a particularly well-known figure in history—Cleopatra. In fact, although Cleopatra is most associated with Egypt. She was Greek in origin.

Cleopatra was the daughter of Ptolemy XII Auletes. He ruled over Egypt for a time before being ousted. He reclaimed the Egyptian throne in 55 BC, by invading Alexandria. This made Egypt part of the Roman Empire. Toward the end of his term, Ptolemy named Cleopatra as his co-regent. When he died, he decreed she and her brother (Ptolemy XIII) should rule Egypt together. The two were married to enforce the arrangement. Then, they were both co-regents, although Cleopatra tended to rule alone.

Early in her reign, Cleopatra faced challenges as the country endured deficient floods of the Nile, famine, economic failures, and political conflicts. Simultaneously, Cleopatra further established herself as an independent ruler. Due to a poorly run conflict with the Gabiniani (powerful Roman troops stationed in Egypt to protect Roman interests), Cleopatra fell from power. Her brother was placed in charge, and she fled to exile.

However, her brother, Ptolemy, soon made a miscalculation of his own, by ordering the death of Julius Caesar's son-in-law. When Caesar arrived in Egypt, he was angry and took over as arbiter to resolve the rival claims of Ptolemy and Cleopatra. However, being cunning, Cleopatra had smuggled into the palace to meet Caesar. When the two met, they forged both a political and a romantic alliance.

Caesar helped to defeat Ptolemy's army, and so promoted Cleopatra's claim to the throne. The two soon had a son, Ptolemy Caesar (born in 47 BC), although Caesar refused to name the child as his heir. He instead placed a grandnephew as his heir. When Cleopatra and Caesar later visited Rome, it was considered scandalous, because he was already married. After Caesar's assassination, Cleopatra returned to Egypt.

There, she ruled with her son as her co-regent. During the Roman Civil War, she sided with the Caesarian party, which was led by Mark Antony. The two soon formed a relationship. They lived in Alexandria, Egypt for a time. Cleopatra birthed twins (Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene II). Distance

took Cleopatra and Antony away from one another for a time, but they later resumed their relationship. The two married and he soon made Alexandria his permanent home. They had one more child.

The two initially fought together against Octavian to protect Cleopatra's claims over Egypt. Later, Antony's armies deserted and joined with Octavian's. To finance her troops in the war, Cleopatra stole gold from the tomb of Alexander the Great. War is not easy, and the defeats they faced took their toll on each of them. Historians are unclear on all the facts, but it is believed they likely died by suicide (in 30 BC).

Cleopatra was the last Hellenistic ruler of Egypt. Further, because Egypt was under Roman rule at the time, her reign is also inextricably linked to the Roman Empire and back to Greece. Thus, she is a significant part of Egyptian, Roman, and Greek History.

Chapter 11 – Hadrian's Travels

Another figure most closely linked to Roman History, who by way of Roman dominion over Greece, influenced Greek history was Publius Aelius Hadrianus (Hadrian). He ruled as Roman emperor from AD 117 to 138. His rule and work were influential for the Roman Empire and Greece as its subsidiary.

Hadrian claimed to be born in Rome; however, his maternal side of the family was from Hispania (modern day Spain), and it is likely he was born outside of Italy. Hadrian's paternal lineage can be traced to an ancient town in Italy—Picenum. However, his father was also born and raised in Hispania. At age 10, Hadrian was orphaned. He was taken in as a ward of Trajan and Publius Acilius Attianus. Hadrian was educated and raised similarly to Roman aristocrats.

As a young man, Hadrian entered politics. His first post was as a judge for Rome's inheritance court. He then moved on to serve as a military tribune, under Legio II and then Legio V. In that role, Hadrian had the good fortune to inform his mentor, Trajan, he would be heir to the emperor. Hadrian served a third term as tribune for Legio XXII. His role as tribune gave him advantages for his political career.

In AD 101 Hadrian was elected to a higher public office position, that of quastor (essentially a liaison between the emperor and the senate). He continued climbing the political ranks in various positions and served on the military battlefield. Despite his successes in Rome, Hadrian decided to travel to Greece. There, he was given Athenian citizenship. He was also appointed as eponymous archon for Athens. For his work, the Greeks honoured him with a statue placed in the Theatre of Dionysus. After a time, Hadrian was called to serve Rome again. He served as a legate in an expedition against Partha. Then, he acted as general commander of the Eastern Roman army, when Trajan became too ill to do so.

Trajan died while trying to return to Rome. Hadrian relied on close relationships with Trajan's family, especially the women of the family, to support his bid as Trajan's successor. Trajan's wife felt she and Hadrian shared the same ideals and goals for the Roman Empire, which was to run it as a commonwealth with a culture based in Hellenic customs. Unfortunately,

discord between Hadrian and Trajan had somewhat derailed Hadrian's political career. Further, Trajan had stopped explicitly supporting Hadrian's political bids and did not name Hadrian as his heir. Instead, it was Trajan's wife that did name Hadrian as heir and as such many questioned the legitimacy of it. Nonetheless, the Roman Senate did support Hadrian's position.

Now, emperor, Hadrian suppressed a Jewish revolt in the east and then addressed disturbances along the Danube. While Hadrian was on the war-front, his former guardian, Attianus, ruled Rome in his stead. Attianus ordered the execution of high ranking officers because he suspected a conspiracy among them. The action, which had happened without due process, caused discord between Hadrian and the Roman Senate.

Hadrian spent much of his time as emperor outside of Italy. He appointed a close friend, Marcius Turbo, to serve when he was away. This was an unusual practice, but Hadrian wanted to see the empire. It also allowed him to make calculated moves to reshape the Empire and bring in the Hellenic culture, he so admired. Hadrian also travelled to ancient Britannia. There he ordered a wall be built separating the empire's border from this land to the North. He also visited southern Gaul and Spain. In these areas, he oversaw new constructions of temples and a basilica. He visited Mauretania, where he funded military training for young men, with the expectation they would later join the Roman military. In Euphrates, he negotiated a settlement and observed the Roman defences there. He continued along his journey and eventually arrived in Greece.

When Hadrian arrived in Greece, it was the year AD 124. It was the autumn season, and he could participate in the Eleusinian Mysteries (initiations for a cult of Greek gods). While in Greece, Hadrian was active in their political life. He revised their constitution, made decisions about the economy, and created foundations to fund public games/events. He argued for the building of structures such as aqueducts and public fountains. He also helped to restore ancient shrines. All his actions served to support Roman rule over the area, by associating Roman leadership with Greek culture. He also invited Greek politicians into the Roman senate. All these actions strengthened the political connections been Greece and the broader Roman Empire.

After his activity in Greece, Hadrian set out to return to Italy. On the way, he visited Sicily. Once back in Italy, he toured the country. There, he also restored shrines and other important structures. While many appreciated his

improvements, people were less accepting of his decision (in AD 127) to divide Italy into four separate regions that could be ruled by leaders (essentially like governors). Soon, Hadrian fell ill. He continued to travel. He visited Africa, and his arrival coincided with the end of a drought.

Hadrian was soon pulled back to his beloved Greece. He focused this visit on Athens and Sparta. He wanted to institute a Panhellenion council to bring all the Greek cities together in a united group. After setting that great work into motion, he continued with more travels into Egypt. There, he restored tombs and sailed on the Nile. During a trip along the Nile, Hadrian's close friend and possible lover Antinous drowned in unknown circumstances. In Antinous's honour, Hadrian established Antinopolis, an unusual temple-city complex that would run like a Greek polis.

Soon Hadrian returned to Greece, to inaugurate the Panhellenion. City-states had to show genuine Greek heritage to be a part of this. It was all part of Hadrian's attempts to protect classic Greek culture. Some at the time felt his view of Hellenistic culture was too narrow, and they were not interested in joining the Panhellenion. In contrast, others viewed Hadrian as a deity. He was given honorific titles and monuments were erected in his honour. Hadrian wintered in Athens before going east, towards Judaea.

In Judaea, Hadrian continued his works of rebuilding and improvement. Some incorrectly believed he planned to assimilate a Jewish Temple for use by the Romans. Records suggest Hadrian also intended to abolish other Jewish traditions, such as circumcision. An anti-Hellenistic and Anti-Roman uprising grew among the Jewish people. The Romans were unprepared and overwhelmed. However, they ultimately defeated the Jewish people, and it is believed they inflicted harsh punitive measures. This included removing the province from the Roman map and renaming several key areas.

Hadrian eventually returned to Rome. He was disappointed that progress towards a cosmopolitan empire had been disrupted. He continued trying to build the links between Rome and Greece, including erecting a Temple to Greek and Roman goddesses, to demonstrate the universal nature of the whole empire.

As Hadrian faced the end of his life, he had to deal with the question of who would succeed him as he had no biological children. He adopted a consul, Lucius Ceionius Commodus, to be his heir. Some suspected Lucius was Hadrian's biological son. Lucius died before Hadrian did, so Hadrian adopted

Titus Aurelius Fulvus Boionius Arrius Antoninus to be his heir. This decision was not well-received.

In AD 138, Hadrian died. He was age 62. His health had been failing for some time, and it is believed heart failure may have been the cause of his death.

Hadrian had worked nearly his whole life in support of Hellenistic culture. Soon after his death another, a new threat emerged in the region, one which left destruction in its path and fear among the people of Greece and the Roman Empire. Hellenistic culture was under threat, and the Greek people were once again most focused on survival.

Chapter 12 – Gothic Raids on Greece

Although they brought destruction, leaving an enormous impact on the ancient world, the origin of the ancient Gothic (or Goth) tribes remains mostly a mystery. There is limited evidence of their travels, culture, and history before their contact with the Roman Empire, which included Greece. Archaeologists and scholars have examined multiple groups that may have comprised the Goths, hoping to discern their origins and path. However, they have reached no definitive conclusions.

The historical information becomes more clear starting in the 3rd century AD when various Gothic tribes began approaching towards Asia Minor and the Balkans. In those locations, they affected mostly Greek areas of settlement. In the beginning, these raids were limited to the northern coast of the Black Sea and the lower Danube River. This changed after the defeat of the Romans at the Battle of Arbritus in AD 251. The Battle of Arbritus was fought against a confederation of Scythian and Gothic tribesmen.

Following this victory, the Goths likely felt more confident and continued extending their reach. They began raiding and pillaging the main region of Asia Minor with impunity. Even the greatest and most ancient cities of the area could not escape their wrath. The Goths were brutal, massacring the people in their path. Entire populations were cut down to nearly nothing. This also destroyed the economic outlook for the region. Extensive Gothic raids throughout Asia Minor occurred during the reign of Emperor Valerian.

In AD 253, the Goths and their allies sought to extend their reach even further. Some Gothic groups sailed south along the coast of Asia Minor, where they reached Ephesus and Pessinus. Meanwhile, other Gothic hordes set out to raid and terrorize the Greek mainland. The Boranians (allies of the Goths), forced the Roman commander of Bosporus to give up his fleet. Next, the Gothic hordes besieged the city of Pityus, located on the north-eastern shore of the Black Sea. The city, defended by just a small Roman contingent, successfully drove off the Gothic tribesmen.

Not willing to give into defeat, approximately one year later, the Goths returned to once again claim that region. They were more successful on their second attempt, and the city of Pityus fell to them. Following this success, they sailed south towards Trebizond—a city defended by thick walls and a

Roman garrison. The Romans were not adequately prepared. Some Boranians managed to climb the walls of Trebizond and open the gates to the others. After looting the city and enslaving any surviving people, the Goths and Boranians triumphantly set sail towards home, returning across the Danube.

A second Gothic campaign against Greece and Asia Minor occurred in approximately AD 257. The Goths, confident they could repeat their successes, sailed with a large fleet towards the northern coasts of Asia Minor. Their army followed on land and sea, carving a path of destruction along the western coast of the Black Sea. This time, their primary target was the city of Bithynia but this did not stop them from wreaking havoc along their entire path. The garrison defending the city of Chalcedon abandoned their posts, leaving the city undefended. It was easily conquered. The Goths followed this destruction with some more, by burning down the city of Nikomedeia, which was also abandoned by its defenders. They then continued their path, raiding each city they arrived at. Emperor Valerian could do nothing to stop the rampaging Goths and their allies. The destruction only ceased when the Goths finally tired, deciding to return home.

Seeking a third campaign of death and destruction, the Gothic hordes set out again in approximately AD 260. Additionally, other Germanic tribes established their place in the region. This additional threat contributed to the already present chaos. In about AD 268, the Goths felt pressured to settle down on the south shore of the Dniester River. They arrived with a large army and fleet, including Gothic allies. The military was the largest unified force to invade the Roman Empire during the 3rd century. The army and navy rampaged throughout the region, inflicting their usual destruction.

More recently, historians have discovered portions of an ancient Greek text that describes the influence the Goths inflicted on Greece specifically. The Goths began a raid on Greece by attempting to attack the Grecian city of Thessalonica. The Greeks there successfully defended themselves. The Goth force turned southward toward Athens. The text describes a battle fought at Thermopylae in a narrow pass there, where the Goths were blocked from advancing. They were inspired to stand strong against the Goths with whatever weapons they might have available to them. The outcome of this battle stand-off is not known as the historical records are incomplete.

The psychological impact of frequent Gothic raids was enormous. This was true even for people living further inland, who were less at risk of attack because it was rarely a target for the Goths, as they tended to stay near

waterways. Everyone lived in sheer terror of the distant threat. For example, the residents of Stratonikeia made invocations to Zeus at his temple in Panamara, asking if the city would be attacked. Legend says Zeus communicated they would not allow their city to fall into the hands of the barbarians.

The panic felt by many residents of the region was magnified by the fact the Roman garrisons could rarely stop the Goths. Several times, the garrisons just abandoned their posts or cities, and the residents were left unprotected. This, combined with the Gothic threat, left people terrified they would be attacked and enslaved.

In AD 268, the penultimate battle between the Goths and Romans took place in Naissus of Upper Mysia. The Goths, who were frequently away for months at a time, were also having difficulty getting more provisions. Although they received reinforcements from beyond the Danube, they were finally defeated in 269. The Romans killed or captured 50,000 barbarians and set many of the captured to work as slaves on farms in the region. Although smaller in scale, new waves of barbarians, including Goths attempted to attack again, but they were driven back by approximately AD 277.

In AD 297, the eastern regions of the Roman Empire, nearby and including Greece received more reinforcements to protect against future invasions. Various emperors also worked to redefine the political relations with the Goths, offering peace and keeping them at bay. The hope was to keep this threat in check. These political moves created a peaceful relationship that lasted until the reign of Constantine.

These agreements did not entirely stop all raids, and there was still the occasional attack from some Gothic horde. However, the days of Gothic terror were now behind the people of Greece and the broader Roman Empire. Meanwhile, another dominant force had started to move into the region which would create extensive change.

Chapter 13 – Rise of Christianity

History moves in tandem. Even while wars were fought, and power shifted among hands, another influential movement was spreading through Greece (and the Mediterranean as a whole). That movement was Christianity, and it would strongly influence Greek history.

It is notable that in the first century AD, approximately three-quarters of the Christians, within the Roman Empire, spoke Greek. The scriptures the Christians read were in Greek. Many Christians, before the journeys of Paul, were former adherents of the Jewish faith, and their scriptures were in Greek. Later books of the Bible were originally written in Greek and used expressions, idioms, and illustrations that were easily understood by the Grecians or others familiar with Greek culture. However, neither Jesus nor the apostles nor any of the writers of the New Testament were Greeks. They were all Jewish.

One might wonder how the Greek language becomes so crucial in the spread of Christianity. One might also wonder how those earliest Christian writers, missionaries, and apologists came to present their message, so it was easily understood by Greek-speaking people. Scholars offer answers to these questions through the lens of history.

Under Roman rule, especially during and after the rule of Hadrian, the major cities of Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt still flourished as centres of Greek culture. This Greek culture acted like glue, binding the people in the eastern realms of the Empire. Hellenism acted upon every part of life, including institutions of government, law, commerce, trade, industry, and even fashion. Typically, Athenian design influenced the development of most Greek cities, and there were structures that would have been found in Athens during its primacy: gymnasiums, theatres, public forums, and temples. Ancient Greece was initially polytheistic, but this changed as Christian missionaries arrived.

The history of Christianity expands far past the boundaries of Greece itself. Just as the Greek language influenced the spread of Christianity, the spread of Christianity affected the course of Greek history (alongside other regions of the Mediterranean).

Among the earliest Christian missionaries to preach in the Greek world, no one was more prominent than Paul. To this day, visitors to Athens can stop at

the base of the Areopagus and inspect a bronze plaque commemorating Paul's famous speech there. The account is recorded in the seventeenth chapter of the Book of Acts. The opening words, "Men of Athens," were standard for a Greek orator and were intended to ingratiate himself to his audience, primarily Epicurean, Stoic, and other philosophers.

Instead of criticizing their faith, Paul acknowledged the long tradition of Greek polytheism. This polytheism, by the time Paul arrived, had become so complex in its structure, the people had concluded they might have missed an important deity in their worship. Therefore, they had even erected an alter "To an Unknown God." Paul capitalized on this belief and went on to describe this "Unknown God" as the God known within the Christian faith. According to the account written in Acts, after his preaching, some important figures believed in these new teachings and followed Paul's offering of Christianity: Dionysius the Areopagite, Damaris, and others.

In this way, Paul had reached his listeners by using concepts they could understand. The Stoics at the time agreed with him that God is the source of human life, that all men belong to the same race, that God is not far off from common man, and that human life is dependent on God. Paul supported this last point by citing works of the Stoic poets, Aratus and Cleanthes. Epicureans also found points in common with Paul—that God is alive and can be known, is self-sufficient, requires nothing from men, and does not dwell in handmade temples. These points of the agreement helped many at the time accept Christianity.

However, not all who heard of Paul's work were accepting of it. After years of preaching and missionary work, Paul was persecuted, arrested, tried, and executed in Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero. Further Christian persecution occurred intermittently over the following two centuries, starting with approximately the Great Fire of Rome in AD 64 under Nero. The persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire was carried out by the state and local authorities. Beginning in AD 250, empire-wide persecution took place by decree of Emperor Decius. The decree was in force for 18 months, during which time some Christians were killed while others apostatized to escape execution.

Christians finally saw a reprieve from their centuries-long persecution, under Emperor Flavius Valerius Constantinus (also known as Constantine I or Constantine the Great). Contrary to his predecessors, Constantine saw value in the growth of Christianity. Once he became the sole Emperor (there was a

tetrarchy when he first came to power), he took steps to remove all the legal restrictions on Christianity and brought an end to any official, state-sponsored, persecution.

In the Edict of Milan, composed in AD 313, Constantine offered citizens of the Empire new freedoms and protections from centuries-old bigoted edicts. No doubt, fourth–century Christians felt peace like none before as they read (or heard) of the Edict of Milan. Constantine's conversion to Christianity is controversial and still debated by historians. Scholars are not sure if it was done for personal or political reasons.

However, even before becoming the sole emperor, Constantine had spoken of a dream that he had before a pivotal battle with Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge (AD 312). In the dream, God told Constantine to have the Christian "Chi-Rho" monogram painted on his soldiers' shields to ensure success. Whether it was due to desperation or blind faith, he submitted to the instructions of his dream, carried a new banner of allegiance into battle, and won the battle, even against a troop size double twice his size.

With his victory achieved, and with the drowning of Maxentius earlier in battle, Constantine went on to become sole emperor of an undivided empire, which allowed him to become a victor for Christianity as well. In fact, his actions paved the way for Christianity to lead society rather than be persecuted.

By the 5th century, Christianity was the state religion of the Roman Empire, including Greece. This lead to massive changes in how the faith functioned within society. Because the era of persecution was over, there was a move from private to public worship. Christianity also became a community affair, especially once theological debates and heresies began to surface. Christianity also changed its organizational structure, going from a very localized, congregation-focused set of operations to a formal, stratified structure with differing levels of authority. Additionally, Christian leaders could decide how Christianity would fit in with law and governance, deal with barbarian peoples, and handle the sort of problems that come with any developed society.

Constantine's rule was the dawn of a new era in the Roman Empire. He built a new imperial residence at Byzantium and renamed the city, Constantinople, after himself. It became the capital of the Empire for more than one-thousand years. After more border and cultural changes, the region was eventually

called the Byzantine Empire. That change coincided with the close of ancient Greek history and the beginning of the Medieval Period.

Chapter 14 – End of Antiquity

Although Christianity was rising in the region, the hold of Roman rule was starting to decline, leading eventually to a total change in the Grecian way of life. That change resulted in the turn-over from Roman Rule to Greece becoming a part of the Byzantine Empire. The progressing changes in rule and culture also led to events constituting the end of antiquity because it spurred the region to move out of the period of ancient Greece. However, like anything, it took many steps and events to get there.

From the time of Emperor Diocletian, who ruled in multiple roles as either sole emperor, co-emperor, or part of a Tetrarchy, from AD 284 to 305; the Roman Empire went through serious and long-lasting changes. The Empire was also on a declining trajectory. Several Diocletian's efforts both pushed back against and accelerated, this decline. For example, the tetrarchy divided the Empire to simplify administration and governance. However this division tended to confuse the border regions, and caused further complications when one tetrarch would die before the others.

Although Constantine managed to rule over a unified Roman Empire until his death in AD 337, this unity proved illusory and could not be sustained. In AD 364, Emperor Valentinian I again divided the empire into western and eastern sections, putting himself in power over the west. He appointed his brother Valens to rule over the east. The fate of the two regions diverged considerably over the next several centuries.

In AD 451 the Council of Chalcedon officially established the Christian world into five distinct patriarchates, each ruled by a Patriarch: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople. In AD 476, the barbarian Odoacer overthrew the last Roman emperor (Romulus Augustus) captured Rome, and made himself King of Italy.

Then, in the late 4th century, the migration of Germanic tribes also further disrupted the Empire, eventually resulting in the total collapse of the Western regions. Those places were then replaced by something considered the Barbarian Kingdoms. This meant a decline in the prominence of Grecian culture. Soon, in fact, the Greco-Roman, Christian, and Germanic groups were intermixing, including fusing their cultures together. This laid the foundations for a new developing culture in Western Europe.

Meanwhile, the Eastern half of the Empire benefited from a strong administrative core and political stability, as well as significant wealth compared with other states. The Eastern emperors were also able to exert and maintain control over the empire's economic and military resources to muster sufficient manpower if a hostile force should invade. These advantages provided the Eastern Roman Empire (known then as the Byzantine Empire or Byzantium) the ability to out-survive the Western Roman Empire by almost one thousand years. It also helped maintain Greek culture and language in those regions.

In AD 527, Justinian I became Emperor and reigned until his death in AD 565. Justinian was the first, truly Byzantine Emperor. During the years of his reign, he endeavoured to regain the lands to the West that had been lost to barbarian forces and re-establish the great empire again. His armies were led by the capable and charismatic General Belisarius, who did successfully re-conquer portions of the former Western Roman Empire, including North Africa. Justinian helped grow the empire in other ways too. Many great monuments of the Empire were also built during his reign, including the domed Church of Holy Wisdom, or Hagia Sophia, which still stands today. Justinian also reformed, simplified, and codified Roman law, establishing a Byzantine legal code that lasted for centuries and helped to shape the modern concept of the state and governance.

At the time of Justinian's death, the Byzantine Empire was the largest and most influential state in Europe. However, this came at a steep price. Debt began to mount during his various campaigns and conquests. It produced a severe strain on imperial finances. To accommodate for this, both Justinian and his successors levied a series of massive taxes on Byzantine citizens. Furthermore, the imperial army reduced in size. The army eventually became too dispersed to maintain control over the Empire's now larger borders. A new, even more dangerous threat arose in the form of Islam. In AD 634, Muslim armies began their assault on the Byzantine Empire by storming into Syria. By the end of the century, Byzantium lost Syria, the Holy Land, Egypt, and North Africa to Islamic forces.

Scholars are hard-pressed to name one date or even year to mark the end of the Antiquity in Greece. Some wars and losses marked changes in the region. However, there were slower changes in culture. Greece had been its own dominant culture. It had been influenced by Roman culture. It had been a new mix of cultural attributes within the Byzantine Empire. Over the years after

the Muslim invasions, the culture of Greece continued to change. Aspects were lost, others evolved, and new attributes developed. Ultimately, the gradual socioeconomic changes between ancient and medieval Greece cannot truly be marked by any one date. Despite all the changes, the legacies of ancient Greece have lived on, influencing future generations and far off places.

Conclusion

Given its historical roots and influence on culture, Greece is now considered the “cradle of Western civilization.” It birthed democracy and philosophy. It advanced literature and mathematics. Great figures left their mark on history and remain a part of our modern culture, even in entertainment through books and movies. The significant sites of ancient Greece remain, and visitors travel there to see the architecture and art.

Even after the ancient times, Greece continued to undergo changes that influenced the rest of the world. This included being under the Ottoman Empire for a time. The Greek Orthodox Church also developed and influenced modern Greece, along with the religious landscape in the rest of the world. Modern Greece continues to practice democracy, and the people there enjoy a good economy, quality of life, and positive standard of living.

Today, Greece (officially known as the Hellenic Republic) remains as a country located in Southern Europe with its capital in Athens. The borders of today’s Greece place it on the southern edge of the Balkan Peninsula. Its borders meet Albania to the northwest, Turkey to the northeast. Toward the North lie the Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria. The lower part of the country is surrounded by seas as it has the longest coastline among countries in the Mediterranean. The country is marked by mountains and surrounding islands. It is divided into nine geographic regions, including Central Greece, Macedonia, Peloponnese, Thessaly, Epirus, Thrace, Crete, the Ionian and the Aegean Islands. After years of wars and conflict, the country now mostly enjoys peace and prosperity.

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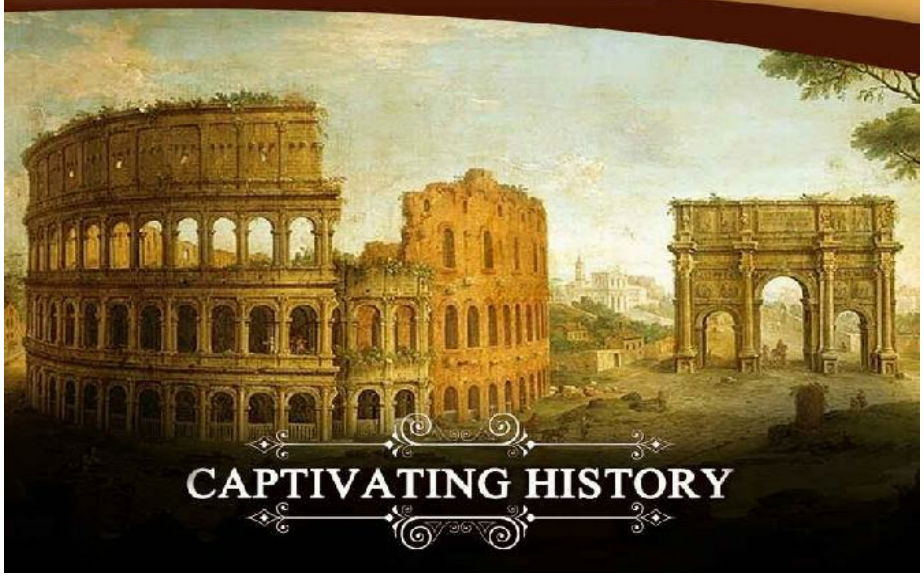
Part 3: Ancient Rome

A Captivating Introduction to the Roman Republic, The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire, and The Byzantine Empire

ANCIENT ROME

A CAPTIVATING INTRODUCTION TO THE ROMAN REPUBLIC, THE RISE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE AND THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE



CAPTIVATING HISTORY

Introduction

The Roman civilization is probably the single most important civilization in the history of the planet. Its expansion defined Europe. Its constitution shaped societies from Russia in the east to the United States and Latin America in the west. Not even its conquerors were immune to the superior Roman culture. When at the dawn of the modern age the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople (the “New Rome” and the capital of the Empire from the age of Constantine the Great), they found themselves captives of its rich tradition. Their own society evolved on Roman wings. Roman law and politics would later influence the US constitution, and, finally, the most obvious descendants of the Roman establishment include the European Union and NATO alliance.

In this book, you’ll learn all you need to know about Roman institutions and politics. But our focus will be on the captivating stories and curious personalities of the Roman emperors, politicians, and generals—from Romulus, Caesar, Augustus, Trajan, and Hadrian, to Constantine, Justinian, and Belisarius. Equally important (and perhaps even more interesting) are the stories of influential women—mothers, wives, and lovers, from Cleopatra and Agrippina to Theodora and Zoe with the Coal-Black Eyes—whose schemes often redirected the course of history.

Unlike other ancient societies, ancient Rome spreads over millennia—from its foundation in the eighth century BC to the fall of Constantinople in AD 1453. Its history is not uniform, and Roman constitutions evolved all the time.

We can break the lengthy timeline of Roman history into four major eras. The first one—the Roman kingdom—begins with the mythic foundation of the city and its first king, Romulus, and it ends with the murder of the last king, Tarquin the Proud, in the sixth century BC.

The second period is the remarkable Roman Republic, the sophisticated era that gave us the Gracchi brothers, Julius Caesar, and Cicero. This period was characterized by highly developed political constitutions and the notions of citizenship, but nevertheless, it fell from within, eaten by corruption and numerous affairs, as you’re soon to know all about. These stories will make you recall present-day political intrigue, scandalous behavior of powerful individuals, populism, and the occasional murder. Ancient Romans used to kill each other off far too often, but they always had some convincing explanations ready to be served. The public and the personal were

intermingled, and political opponents of powerful men were often presented as the enemies of the constitution.

The Romans used to write often and a lot—and not only those Romans whose job was to write, such as poets and historians. Leaders such as Julius Caesar and Marcus Aurelius wrote their memoirs on a daily basis. Thanks to the abundance of the written record, we can get a clear sense of their motives and ambitions and find out the truth about the most controversial events in history, including those that involved traitors, murderers, and spy-mistresses.

The last two periods in Roman history both fall under the "empire." The Augustan Empire, or the "Principate," had a constitution that preserved the institutions of the Republic, and the emperors were formally "first among equals." This period begins with Octavian (Augustus) and ends with a bunch of insignificant emperors who came to the throne by killing their predecessors, got killed by their successors, and were controlled by the increasingly influential "barbarian" leaders.

The final era, although the most recent one, is at the same time the most unfamiliar one and it is almost completely "Lost to the West."[17] It is called the "Dominate," and it begins with Diocletian, who divided and reformed the administration of the vast empire. Two crucial changes took place during this era. Constantine the Great moved the capital to the East and, subsequently, Christianity became the official religion of the empire.

As we'll see, the greatest and most far-reaching revolutions in the history of western civilization first occurred in the Roman world.

Chapter 1 – The Seven Kings of Seven Hills: the Foundation of Rome and Its First Rulers

The history of ancient Rome begins with a shadowy period between myth and history. The foundation legend is not very pretty, and it includes a handful of unheroic elements such as murder and rape. Its protagonists belong to the bottom of society; they were murderers, prostitutes, and all kinds of outlaws who had previously been banished from their cities.[18]

The Foundation Myth

The story begins in the little kingdom of Alba Longa on the Italian peninsula. An evil usurper called Amulius had thrown his brother, King Numitor, from the throne and forced his daughter, Rhea Silvia, to become a virgin priestess so that there would never be anyone who claimed to be Numitor's legitimate heir. But his plan didn't work, and the priestess soon got pregnant, thanks to the ethereal phallus of the god Mars that emerged from the sacred fire.[19] That was her side of the story, which even the first Roman historians used to take with a grain of salt, but never failed to mention.

Rhea Silvia gave birth to twins Romulus and Remus. Amulius instantly ordered for the legendary twins to be thrown into the river Tiber, but his servants left the infants on the shore. A *lupa* (Latin for female wolf or a slang expression for a prostitute) saved them from dying of hunger, and a shepherd took them home with him.

The Capitoline She-Wolf – an icon of Rome[20]

The boys grew up, met their grandfather Numitor, and helped him to reclaim the throne of Alba Longa. Then they moved on, aiming to establish their own city. It turned out they were not such a great team. The brothers quarreled over the location of the future city. Remus insultingly jumped over the

defenses that Romulus was building around Palatine—one of the famous Seven Hills of Rome. Outraged, Romulus killed the disrespectful brother and continued on his own.[21]

The First Romans

Romulus, accompanied by a handful of friends and supporters, managed to build the city, and now they needed a populace. The first king of Rome declared the city as an asylum. The first citizens were outlaws and runaways from all around the peninsula and beyond. An all-male populace couldn't have a bright future, so Romulus came up with a new cunning plan and summoned the neighboring peoples—the Sabines and the Latines—to a family festival. In the middle of the proceedings, Romulus's men captured the teenage girls and young women among the guests and took them away as their wives.

A few years later, the Sabine men came to avenge and rescue their daughters and sisters, only to find out that the women were now happy wives and mothers. They stopped the skirmish and Rome became a shared Roman-Sabine town, ruled by Romulus and the Sabine king Titus Tatius.

Tatius was murdered during a riot and, a couple of years later, Romulus disappeared during a storm. He either turned into the god Quirinus and ascended to the heavens or ended up being killed by his political opponents. [22]

The second king of Rome was a Sabine named Numa Pompilius who established religious traditions such as the Vestal Virgins, introduced the title of Pontifex, and created the twelve-month calendar. Tullus Hostilius succeeded him. His surname was well-deserved, as he was a notorious warrior who conquered and destroyed nearby towns, including the legendary city of Alba Longa. Next kings in line were Ancus Marcius, Tarquinius Priscus ('Tarquin the Elder'), Servius Tullius ("the wisest, most fortunate and best of all Rome's kings"[23]), and Lucius Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the Arrogant or Tarquin the Proud). This Tarquin was responsible for the murder of his predecessor and was known as a merciless tyrant. He ruled by fear until the people of Rome overthrew him to establish the 'free Republic of Rome' in the sixth century BC.

Chapter 2 – The Early Republic: Whole Italy is Roman

No one knows exactly how and when exactly the *res publica* (Republic) really began. Ancient historians such as Livy offered a flawless narrative of what was most likely to have been chaos. They loved to imagine that their traditional institutions went back much further than they really did.[24]

A republic is profoundly different from a monarchy, and this wholly different form of government could not be established overnight. Rome's characteristic institutions shaped up at some point in the fifth or fourth century BC. The Romans outlined the underlying principles of Republican politics bit by bit. They defined 'what it was to be Roman' and their idea of citizenship, civil rights, and responsibilities. Somewhere during that process, Rome finally began to look 'Roman.'[25]

The Patricians, the Plebeians, and the Conflict of Orders

Those two centuries weren't ones of peaceful prosperity. After the elimination of Tarquinius Superbus, the power came into the hands of a small number of aristocratic families collectively known as the patricians.[26] Only the members of patrician families were permitted to hold religious and political office or to be elected consuls. The patricians were wealthy and influential, but the plebeians were the vast majority. During the period between 494 and 287 BC, Rome's underprivileged citizens protested and challenged patrician supremacy.[27]

The plebeians were not just poor people of Rome. Some of them were just as wealthy as patricians, and they required an equal share of political power. The majority of Romans supported them, hoping that the change would relieve their debts. In 494 BC, the consuls needed the army, but the soldiers —who were all plebeians—refused to come. This event is remembered as the First Secession of the Plebs. The patricians were compelled to give the plebeians the right to form the Concilium Plebis and to have their own officials—the tribunes—to protect their rights. A few years later, the first written law, the Twelve Tables, was composed. The progress was gradual and more laws came in the next few decades. Finally, wealthy plebeians had equal rights as patricians. The poor still lacked basic rights, and two more secessions of plebs took place by the end of the third century.

The patricians had to acknowledge plebeian rights, institutions, and organizations. But this was merely a surface. Tribunes rarely used the right of veto to protect the interests of the poor. They themselves were rich, and their interests were the same as those of patricians. However, the institutions of the republic, and a delicate balance of power, were formed. The Roman Republic fully developed during the next two centuries.

Military Expansion during the Early Republic: Taking Italy

The secessions of plebs were so effective because Rome was in a state of war almost all the time during this time as the Roman army fought against neighboring tribes in Italy. The first war was one of defense. Tarquinius Superbus tried to reclaim the Roman throne. He gathered the Etruscan army and attacked Rome and other cities until all of them united in the Latin League and got rid of the aggressive Etruscans. In the end, all Latin cities became a part of the Roman system. Even the Etruscans needed help from Rome when another expansionistic enemy emerged: the Gauls.

The Gaulish Celts had defeated the Roman army once. This defeat was crucial for Roman growth. Despite the considerate damage, the Romans managed to consolidate their army and economy and build massive walls to prevent anyone from seizing the city.[28] Finally, Rome managed to defeat both the Etruscans (who attacked again) and the Gauls. Next were the Samnites, the Campanians, and the coalition of cities called the Latin League, which had been created not so long ago with the help of Rome. The Romans managed to turn one tribe against the other ("divide and rule"), pull the league apart, and make those cities the first Roman colonies.

The Romans gained control of most of Italy bit by bit. The last step was to conquer the Greek colonies in southern Italy, which were known as Magna Graecia ('Great Greece'). The wealthiest and most influential Greek colony was Tarentum. The Tarentines were so wealthy that they managed to hire the number one Greek general of his day, King Pyrrhus of Epirus. His army comprised 25,000 men and 20 war elephants that belonged to the Egyptian ruler Ptolemy II. Pyrrhus won a few victories, but the Romans were far more resilient. During the first half of the third century BC, all Greek cities were compelled to enter the Roman system and become *socii* (allies). Just like the Latin cities were obliged to provide troops, the Greek cities had to provide ships for the Roman army. The whole peninsula became Roman, and it was just the beginning of Roman expansion.

Chapter 3 – The Punic Wars and Mediterranean Dominance: The Middle Republic

Now that the Roman Republic dealt successfully with internal tension as well as opposition within the peninsula, it continued to grow. During the next century and a half, Rome was in the process of becoming a true Mediterranean superpower. That meant it had to fight some new enemies, including the mighty Phoenician city of Carthage in North Africa.

Carthage was founded around 800 BC by the Phoenicians, who specialized in maritime trading. The city was located on an excellent natural harbor that today belongs to the city of Tunis. Carthage had an entire trade in the western Mediterranean under its control and, if we are to believe Polybius, was ‘the richest city in the world.’ Its empire, at the time, comprised North Africa, Spain, Sardinia, and Sicily. Its army consisted of numerous mercenaries and an incredibly well-equipped and efficient navy. Carthage had a hold over the western Mediterranean for years, but the Romans grew stronger, and conflict was inevitable.

The First Punic War

The two forces used to be on good terms with each during the time when Rome had to fight Pyrrhus's aggression. However, after he was defeated, Rome ended up much stronger, and its activities spread to Sicily, which was still under Carthaginian control. In 264 BC, Rome allied with Syracusan Greeks against Carthage, and the First Punic War began.

For centuries Carthage fought against the Syracusans and other Greeks to achieve dominance. But then a band of Italian mercenaries called *the sons of Mars* (*Mamertines*) conquered the Sicilian city of Messina and attacked both Carthaginian and Syracusan territory. The attacks started in 288 BC, and in 265 BC opposing factions within Messina asked Rome and Carthage for help. Carthage sent a fleet, but a Roman army came into Sicily and forced the Carthaginian commander to surrender the town. Syracuse joined Rome against Carthage, and thus the First Punic War began in 264 BC.

The Romans had difficulties approaching the Carthaginian territory in Sicily from land, while the superb navy of the latter started a series of attacks on the Italian coast. It was a tricky situation. Rome had the resources and, now that it was necessary, they decided to build their own navy. And so they did. In only 60 days, they created an impressive fleet. The Greek allies knew how to use the ships and quinqueremes, and the first naval action against the Carthaginians was a success.

A few years later, the Romans—who became a serious naval force almost overnight—sent an army to Africa to attack Carthage. The outcome was disastrous, but Roma was resilient and managed to build a new fleet in a short time span. The war ended in 241 with Rome as the absolute winner. Carthage was devastated both militarily and economically and was forced to pay expensive reparation costs. As for the Roman Republic, its power was now additionally confirmed.

The Second Punic War and the First Roman Military Star: Scipio Africanus

The Second Punic War started in 218 BC when the two sides had conflicting interests in Spain. The Carthaginian forces were led by the brilliant general Hannibal, one of the best military geniuses of ancient times—"always the first to attack, the last to leave the field."[29]

The Romans were preparing to invade Carthaginian lands in both Spain and North Africa. At the same time, Hannibal marched for the Alps, aiming to invade Italy. He had lost many men and elephants, but the Cisalpine Gauls joined him. In 218 he managed to enter Italy and won many battles during the next couple of years, including the Battle of Cannae. Hannibal also led a propaganda war and acted as a liberator of Roman allies, stating that they no longer had an obligation to provide Rome with troops or contribute to the Roman tax system. The Republican army lost over 70,000 men and several consuls (consuls led the Roman army at the time).

Rome had to change its tactics quickly. Some experienced military leaders were restored to power instead of electing new magistrates every year. Rome was recovering thanks to Fabius Maximus Cunctator ("Delayer") and Marcus Claudius Marcellus, who quickly became known as the "Shield and Sword of Rome." But the war was raging on other fronts, too, and the two Roman generals who led the army in Spain—brothers Publius and Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio—were killed in battle. Then something happened without precedent in Roman history: Publius's 24-year-old son, also named Publius Cornelius Scipio, became the head of the army. He was too young and ineligible to apply for a position of authority, but there he was—brave, efficient, and popular. Young Scipio restructured the forces in Spain, introduced new weapons, and reorganized the Roman legion. By 205, Scipio and his men had expelled the Carthaginian forces from Spain. In 202, now as the consul of Rome, Scipio defeated the Carthaginians on their own ground in northern Africa, and he took the name Africanus.

Scipio didn't burn Carthage to the ground, but his adopted grandson, Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus, did several decades later, prompted by the aggressive campaign of several elderly senators who said, *Carthago delenda est* ("Carthage must be destroyed").

Chapter 4 – Decay, Corruption, and Civil Wars: The Late Republic

The politics of the Roman Republic had a perfectly clean façade, with white togas, high rhetoric, advanced institutions, and a noble sense of virtue and justice. But under the surface, it was characterized by a lust for power and conspiracies. Publicly unknown wealthy individuals ruled from the shadows, letting their puppets do the politics in public.

By about 130 BC, the Roman Republic had the whole Mediterranean under its control and had already become the most powerful state in the ancient world and beyond. Lots of treasure had been brought to Rome, from the spoils of war to Greek artifacts (Greece had always had a special status and was much admired by the Romans). Without a major war to occupy them, the leading class of Rome was busy exercising power and influence internally, while gaining private wealth. Ambition and corruption defined those years, and civil war threatened to diminish all that had been achieved over the previous centuries. The wealthy grew wealthier, the poor became even poorer, and the traditional institutions were on the edge of destruction. The 'noble' families controlled entire political system, votes were constantly being bought, and plebeians were prevented from entering the Senate.

The Martyrs of Social Justice: the Gracchi Brothers

Two men were determined to end the injustice, and thanks to their highest patrician origin, they had the means to fight it. They were the brothers Tiberius and Gaius Sempronius Gracchus. The elder, Tiberius, put his efforts into reforming the very system that had made their families powerful, and he used all the methods available to weaken the aristocracy. He brought a law to confiscate many properties that the elite had unlawfully occupied and to distribute public land to the unemployed, but the law could not be enforced. Now the whole senatorial elite were against him, obstructed his efforts, and eventually got him killed and thrown into the river Tiber.

Tiberius's younger brother, Gaius Sempronius Gracchus, knew he was to expect a similar destiny, but he was nevertheless determined to redistribute the land to the small farmers. He ended up alone (his supporters had been killed), and the Senate decided that his death would be in Rome's best interest. So they promised that whoever brought Gaius's head would be rewarded with its weight in gold. The lucky winner who found his body (Gaius committed suicide meanwhile), first took the brain out and filled it with molten lead, so that he would receive more gold.

Marius the New Man and Sula

During the last decade of the second century BC, the Roman army needed some serious refreshment. The so-called Jugurthine War lasted for a couple of years. Rome had a more powerful army, but Numidian king Jugurtha took advantage of the corruption and ineptitude of Roman generals. Then a *new man* (novus homo) emerged in Rome. Marius became consul thanks to his abilities, not his lineage. He beat Jugurtha expeditiously, managed to deal with the German tribes that were moving into Roman Territory, and reformed the army.

Marius's military reform had profound consequences. He established a professional infantry, which consisted of men who previously had nothing. They were promised a farm at the end of their service, and because of that, they were loyal to their general, not the Senate. From that point on, Rome had private armies in the service of men wealthy enough to keep them.

Marius's long-time rival, the general Lucius Cornelius Sulla, took advantage of the new system. When the Senate requested him to give over the command over the army he had been leading, he refused, and his soldiers remained loyal to him personally. The army marched on Rome, and personal war between Sula and Marius characterized the next years.

The Triumviri: Pompeius, Crassus, and Caesar

A new generation of powerful generals emerged after Sulla's death. Three men—Gnaeus Pompeius (later known simply as Pompey), Marcus Licinius Crassus, and Gaius Julius Caesar—led their personal armies and competed for power. Sometimes they cooperated, depending on the circumstances. In the end, all of them were brutally murdered.

Pompey and Crassus could not stand each other, but they needed to work together in order to prevent the Senate from taking the armies from them. In 70 BC, they became joint consuls, but the elite obstructed their numerous plans and requests until another man joined them in 60 BC. The third man was Julius Caesar, and at the time he was the governor of Further Spain (present-day Portugal). The three generals established the First Triumvirate (the rules of three "triumviri"). The next year Caesar was elected consul, arranged things in Rome, and went to Gaul, where he was allowed to have an army. He led that army well and conquered everything from Rome to the coastlines of Atlantic and the North Sea.

While Caesar was on the go, trying to establish himself as a true Roman leader, Rome remained under the control of the tribune Publius Clodius Pulcher. He was profoundly corrupt, and he used Caesar's funds to pay gangs of hooligans to do what they were told. Pulcher's actions included having Cicero banished from Rome, imprisoning Pompey in his own home, and seducing Caesar's wife. Pompey was influential enough to strike back and increase his authority in Rome, which would later put him at odds with Caesar.

Cicero against Catiline

Lucius Sergius Catilina (or Catiline) was a furious, bankrupt noble who had reportedly planned to liquidate Rome's elected officials, burn the Senate to the ground, and write off the debts of rich and poor alike. Everybody whose name meant something in Rome had chosen their sides and acted behind the scenes. The man who openly confronted Catiline was the famous orator, politician, and philosopher Cicero. He used his verbal artistry to assert that he had exposed Catiline's awful plan and saved the state.

Even though Catiline was a patrician, and Cicero a *new man*, the elite supported the latter, who became a consul in 62. The next year, the two men were candidates again. Cicero claimed he had a reason to be scared for his life, gave a series of speeches against his opponent, and had him banished from the city.

Catiline and his supporters gathered at the border of Rome. Meanwhile, Cicero exposed those that were still inside the city and had them killed without a proper trial—a decision that seriously damaged his political career. Only a few years later, he ended up banished from Rome. His exile was temporary, but he never managed to restore his former status.

Chapter 5 – Gaius Julius Caesar, Crossing the Rubicon, and Death that Shook the City

Ten years after the forming of the First Triumvirate, the political climate changed in Rome, Crassus was dead, and the warm friendship between Caesar and Pompey had vanished. The consul in charge in 50 BC, Gaius Marcellus, demanded Caesar's withdrawal from Gaul. This meant that Caesar would need to give up command over his army. He agreed, but with one condition—Pompey would need to surrender his command first.

Julius Caesar became a public enemy. The Senate gave Pompey the Senatus Consultum Ultimum and the power to arrest Caesar and get rid of him once for all. His prospects were poor; he could either capitulate or stay there and fight Pompey's army, which was nearly as powerful as his. None of it was an option for Caesar. In 49 BC, he led his army against Rome itself. He crossed the river Rubicon and went to Italy. This could be perceived as a war against the Republic, but there was no way back. *Iacta alea est.*

Caesar entrance to Rome was glorious. His troops overwhelmed those of Pompey easily, and he seized his city. The senators were terrified, but Caesar did not want revenge. His troops were highly disciplined. Nothing was ruined and, after the brief skirmish was over, no one got killed. Caesar's opponents were spared. The great leader was already popular, but this new generosity made his reputation even better. Caesar wasn't benevolent toward the senators only. He also canceled debts, brought Italians into the Senate, and allowed the men who had been exiled by Sulla and Pompey to return to Rome. Even Pompey's soldiers who remained in Rome were welcome to serve Caesar. Overnight, Julius Caesar became a public hero.

Caesar and Cleopatra

Pompey, now Caesar’s greatest adversary, fled to Greece the very night when Caesar conquered Rome. Aiming to retake Italy, he employed Roman soldiers from border garrisons and gathered a huge army in Greece. His troops twice outnumbered Caesar’s, but it wasn’t enough. After several clashes between the two armies, Caesar finally beat Pompey at the Battle of Pharsalus in 48 BC. Pompey escaped to Egypt, where Pharaoh Ptolemy XIII had him killed, hoping that Caesar would reward him.

Ptolemy XIII desperately needed Caesar’s support. He had been fighting for power against his sister and wife (the Ptolemies of Egypt loved to keep it in the family), Cleopatra VII. Ptolemy, as a male, was the legitimate ruler, but he was cruel and widely loathed. Cleopatra, on the other hand, was popular, but she was banished from the country. In 48 BC, she gathered an army and came from Syria to the border of Egypt. This was the situation when Caesar arrived.

Even though they were rivals, Julius Caesar was shocked by the way Pompey was murdered. He furiously marched into Alexandria and took control of the palace. Then he ordered both Ptolemy and Cleopatra to discharge their troops and meet him. Cleopatra came a bit early—the night before the appointment, hidden inside an oriental rug brought as a present to Caesar. He loved the present very much and one of the most famous romances in ancient history began. Caesar and Cleopatra became lovers, and they would stay together until Caesar’s death. A couple of years later, the couple had a son named Ptolemy Caesar, or simply Caesarion.

The Beloved Dictator

Caesar decided to return to Rome in 47 BC, right after the romantic episode. On the way back, he crushed all the remaining opponents. The last army that was still loyal to the memory of Pompey got defeated in 46 BC at the Battle of Thapsus.

The Senate declared Julius Caesar dictator for ten years. He was now the absolute ruler of the Roman world, and he was determined to be an excellent leader. It was his task to repair the damage that had been done during the previous years. He needed to restore the Republic, make the institutions work properly, settle military veterans, and reestablish law and order.

Caesar was a visionary who came up with concrete steps to return stability in the Roman world. The reforms were thorough, and he resolved some social issues that could otherwise lead to unrest. He, for instance, spared Pompey's supporters if they were willing to change sides. The unemployed who depended on the free corn dole were moved to colonies, where they could work and sustain their families. Caesar's army veterans were given land in the existing and new colonies. People empire-wide were given Roman citizenship and the right to enter the Senate. Taxes were reduced wherever it was possible. Stability returned to the Roman world.

People admired their just and capable leader, but the Senate was disappointed. Instead of operating within the Republican system, Caesar kept his army and had more power than anyone expected. Moreover, he exercised his power unrestrainedly. First, he appointed himself a consul several years in a row, and then he took over the powers of a tribune. Instead of restoring the Republican system, he was undermining it. Caesar's men filled the Senate. His word was law. Statues of himself were raised next to those of gods and kings. His bust was on coins. On top of that, in 44 BC Caesar had himself declared Dictator Perpetuus (Dictator for Life). He felt so invincible that he dismissed his bodyguard. Caesar acted like a king and was preparing to become one by fulfilling a prophecy and defeating Parthia. The beginning of the campaign was scheduled for March 18, 44 BC.

Caesar’s Death

Caesar’s quiet opponents were enraged by his actions, and they knew they needed to do something quickly. A group of conspirators saw an opportunity and had Caesar stabbed at a Senate meeting on the Ides of March. The unfortunate dictator had expected an assault, but the death came by the hands of men whom he trusted, Brutus and Cassius. Brutus was his adopted son and, as such, he had no material interest from killing Caesar. The motives of the conspirators were of a different kind. The young men were deceived. They called themselves the Liberators of the Republic and expected to be celebrated for liberating Rome from the tyrant. However, they were wrong. Instead of cheering crowds, they found an empty Forum. The senators were nowhere to be seen. The public was not on the side of conspirators, and they realized they should leave the town immediately.

The conspirators against Julius Caesar had no idea that this was merely the beginning of one of the most exciting periods in Roman history, and it had nothing to do with them. Brutus and Cassius murdered one autocratic leader, but the process of transformation of the Republic into the Empire had already begun—and it was unstoppable.

Chapter 6 – The Rise of First Roman Emperor

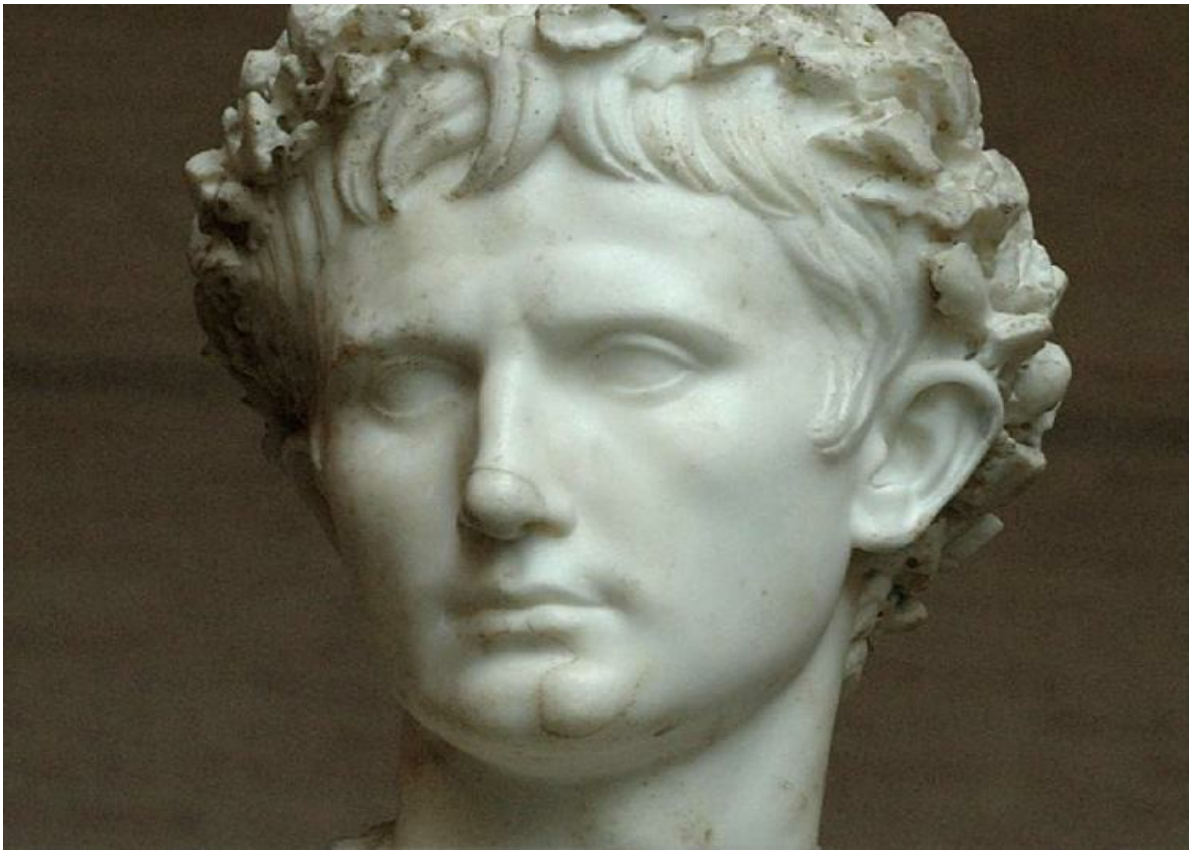
The assassination of Julius Caesar triggered tension in Rome that almost resulted in chaos. The masses wanted revenge, and someone needed to calm them down. That someone was Caesar's loyal friend and associate, Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony). Antony was tribune in 49 BC, and he defended Caesar's interests when the Senate wanted him to discharge his army. He was also a skilled war commander, and he led parts of Caesar's army on many occasions. In the moment of Caesar's death, Antony was his fellow consul, and now he was the one in charge.

Antony organized a public funeral for the deceased dictator. People flooded the streets in a fury and burned the conspirators' homes. If they were still in Rome, they wouldn't survive that night. But they were already away. The man who helped them escape alive was, again, Mark Antony. Even though he knew very well that many of the conspiracy inspirers, including Cicero, wanted him dead too, Antony acted pragmatically and prevented the delicate situation from escalating into a catastrophe. Trying to keep everyone happy, he even gave Brutus and Cassius some land in new, distant provinces in the Roman East.

For a brief moment, it looked like Antony would succeed Caesar swiftly, but the Senate was against the idea. Moreover, Caesar had already expressed his will and named an heir. It wasn't Antony.

The Second Triumvirate

The man whom Caesar named as his heir was his nephew, Gaius Octavius Thurinus.[30] Octavius was attending military training in Northern Greece when he heard the news. Then he quickly changed his name to Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus (the change was not final, as he was yet to become Augustus) and returned to Rome to claim his inheritance.



Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, also known as Octavian and, later, Augustus[31]

Octavian quickly found out that Antony was buying his way to the top, using both Caesar's private treasure and public funds. The two men instantly became rivals. Assured that Octavian would eliminate him, Antony came up with a plan that enabled him to take control over the army. He made himself the governor of Gaul, where he was safely surrounded by protective troops. Octavian gathered an army too, with the help of the Senate, and went after him. But it wasn't that simple. Brutus and Cassius wanted to return to Rome, and the Senate quietly, yet efficiently, supported them. Antony wanted to attack Brutus, and Octavian did not want to defend Caesar's murderers. The Senate realized that Octavian wasn't interested in serving their interests, and they obstructed him by holding back the money he needed for the troops.

Octavian returned to Rome with his legions, made himself a consul, and sentenced all conspirators against Caesar. Then he and a loyal man named Marcus Lepidus met Antony. The situation was politically intricate, and just like Caesar and Pompey in the previous generation, Octavian and Antony started cooperating against a mutual enemy—the "liberators" and the Senate. On November 27, 43 BC, Octavian, Antony, and Lepidus went ahead and formed the Second Triumvirate, with the public goal of restoring the Republic and dealing with anyone who had any connection with Caesar's murder. Over two thousand influential men and three hundred senators, including Cicero, were killed. Even more people were banished. The rest of the Senate had less power than ever, as the "triumviri" (the three rulers, or triumvirs) controlled everything. They no longer needed the Senate's permission to hold an army or go to war. The political resistance was ended. The triumvirs ruled Italy, and each of them had control over some provinces —Octavian over Africa, Antony over Gaul, and Lepidus over Spain. Lepidus was left in charge in Italy during military campaigns, such as the one that Antony and Octavian led in 42 BC when they defeated the "liberators" in the Battle of Philippi.

The Triumvirate was now invincible from the outside. The only force that could end this form of government was one of the triumvirs themselves, and their rivalry.

After the victory at Philippi, Antony went to the east to fight some enemies and expand the empire. Octavian stayed in Rome and diminished Lepidus's influence. Then he made some serious steps toward autocracy. Octavian confiscated vast properties from many influential landowners and gave them to his retiring soldiers. The dispossessed people, led by Antony's wife Fulvia and Lucius Antonius (Antony's brother), protested and another civil war began. Antony came to settle things down in 40 BC, made a deal with Octavian, married his sister Octavia (Fulvia had died in the meantime), and promptly returned to the east. He had conquered something valuable there, and he needed to go back and take care of it. It was the affection of the Egyptian queen Cleopatra.

Antony’s Eastern Mission

Antony planned to continue where Caesar had stopped—to invade Parthia and reconquer Syria and Asia Minor. But there were some unresolved issues he needed to deal with first. Antony had heard that Cleopatra—the queen of Egypt and lover of late Caesar—was financing Cassius, probably in order to keep some influence over the political situation in Rome. He went to interrogate her but got captured by her legendary irresistibleness. They met in 42 BC, and they were already living together when, in 40 BC, Antony had to return to Rome.

In Rome, Antony and Octavian split the empire among themselves. Rome, Italy, and all the territories west of Ionian Sea were under Octavian’s control. Antony governed the eastern provinces. Lepidus was in charge in Africa, but he was no longer equal to the two powerful rulers of the Roman world. As soon as it was all set, in 37 BC, Antony returned to Egypt.

Completely ignoring the fact that he was formally married to Octavian’s sister, he married Cleopatra. The couple had three children, to whom Antony gave incredible royal titles and power over strategically important provinces such as Syria and Armenia.

Octavian Has the Final Word

Octavian believed that Antony's behavior was outrageous. The last straw was when Octavia, Octavian's sister who was still Antony's legal wife, went to see her husband in Athens. She was treated with utmost disrespect and, upon returning to Rome, got expelled from Antony's house. Octavian decided it had been enough; he would deal with Antony and Cleopatra and take control over the entire empire.

In 31 BC, Octavian won the Battle of Actium against Antony's and Cleopatra's weakened armies. The couple fled the battlefield and, as a result, Antony lost any credibility in the eyes of his men. During that and the following year, many troops and kings changed sides, leaving Antony alone. In 30 BC, Octavian conquered Alexandria and took charge of Cleopatra's palace.

The story of Antony and Cleopatra ended theatrically. Cleopatra locked herself in her tomb, and her servants announced her death. Antony found out she was alive only after he had stabbed himself. Fatally wounded, he was taken to Cleopatra and died in her arms. The queen and her children ended up imprisoned, but she killed herself with the help of a snake. The son she had with Caesar was promptly murdered, so he could never get an opportunity to claim to be the heir of Julius Caesar.

Egypt had become the part of Octavian's Roman Empire. One era had ended and another begun, with Octavian as the ruler of most of the known world.

Chapter 7 – Early Roman Empire: Princeps Augustus and Julio-Claudian Dynasty

In 27 BC, Octavian was proclaimed *Imperator Caesar Divi Filius Augustus*, which literally means “emperor, son of the god Caesar (Caesar was deified several years earlier), the holy/revered/noble one (Augustus).” Octavian changed his name, and from that moment, he was only referred to as Augustus. Moreover, he was now the high priest (*Pontifex Maximus*) of traditional Roman religion. On coins and statues, he was often depicted as a heroic warrior of semi-divine origin. Yet, officially, he was only a *princeps*, first among citizens, and not a monarch. It was the beginning of Augustan Empire or *Principate*, a new period in Roman history that would last until late third century AD.

The Age of Augustus

Even though Augustus was effectively the sole ruler of the empire, he was very careful to maintain the illusion of the republican system. The Senate was still important, but only formally, to give legitimacy to Augustus's decisions.

The age of Augustus is commonly known as the golden age in Roman history. It was the time of peace, prosperity, social stability, and cultural renaissance. People were happy because "the soldiery he enticed with gifts, the people with corn, and all alike with the charms of peace and quiet."[32] A standing army was protecting the borderlines of the empire for the first time. Rome thrived. Augustus initiated a thorough reconstruction of the city, and gave it an unprecedented glory.

Most of all, Augustus paid special care to his own image. He finalized the construction of the Temple of Venus Genetrix, which had begun under Caesar. The goddess of love was identified as the divine ancestress of both Caesar and Augustus. The two men belonged to the family of Iulii, which was believed to have originated from Aeneas and his son Ascanius (also known as Iulus).

Just like Caesar, Augustus was well aware of the power of the written word, and he wanted to ensure a special place in history. While Caesar himself wrote, leaving detailed accounts of all his actions and persuasive explanations of his decisions, Augustus hired professionals to perform this task. Along with his wealthy friend Maecenas, he identified the most prominent poets and historians of his time and made sure they didn't lack for anything, as long as they worked on his historical project. Nearly all Roman literature classics were created in this cultural tide, but the special place belongs to Virgil's *Aeneid*, which glorified Augustus's divine origin more effectively than any temple.

Augustus's private life was strongly intermingled with his public appearance, and the members of his family had to abide to his sense of duty. His first wife was named Scribonnia, and with her he had his only child—his daughter Julia. Marriage had strategical importance for him. He divorced Scribonia (the reason was that he simply couldn't get along with her) and married Livia. Livia had to divorce first, too. She was the wife of one of the most powerful Augustus's political opponents: Tiberius Claudius Nero. Not only that he married her, but he also adopted their sons and raised them as princes with a strong sense of duty toward the Augustan empire.

Julia also married several times, complying with her father's wishes. First she had to marry Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, Augustus's close friend and the military genius who enabled most of the emperor's military achievements (even during the time when he was just Octavian, one of the three triumvirs). Agrippa was terribly powerful yet totally loyal to his friend and father-in-law. Augustus hoped that this fine soldier and virtuous man would succeed him on the throne and be followed by the sons he had with Julia. That way, Augustus would establish a dynasty and all the future emperors would be of his blood. However, things didn't go as he imagined. Agrippa died, and after a while, his and Julia's sons died too. Augustus needed to make a compromise and make his adopted sons, Drusus and Tiberius, his heirs. The two men belonged to the Roman aristocratic family of Claudii. Augustus belonged to Iulii (alt. Julii), and the dynasty that he established is known as Julio-Claudian.

When even Drusus (who was seriously considered as Augustus's potential heir) died of a fall off a horse after a successful campaign, the emperor thought of choosing Drusus's son, Germanicus. He was another "Claudii," but his mother was the daughter of emperor's sister Octavia and Mark Antony. Moreover, Germanicus was the finest general of his time, a man of virtue. He was already immensely popular and would make a successful emperor. But then another, a bit more complicated, arrangement was made. Augustus would be succeeded by Tiberius, who would, in turn, adopt his nephew Germanicus and make him his own heir. The man who was least happy with this arrangement was, surprisingly, Tiberius.

The Life and Reign of Tiberius

It wasn't easy to be Augustus's son—even an adopted one. His private life was considered a public matter. Augustus picked his wife. She was named Vipsania Agrippina and was the daughter of the emperor's late friend Agrippa. After eight years, when Agrippa died, and Augustus's daughter Julia became a widow, the emperor then ordered Tiberius to divorce his wife and marry Julia. This may have looked simple to Augustus, but Tiberius truly loved Vipsania. The couple lived in loving harmony for years, and Vipsania was pregnant with the second child at the time.[33] The child did not survive. The marriage of Tiberius and Julia was full of scandalous affairs. Julia was so promiscuous that Augustus eventually banished her from Rome. As for Tiberius, he never got over the divorce and never ceased to love his first wife.

When Augustus died, Tiberius swiftly succeeded him. As the emperor of Rome, he was very competent. Rome was safe, cities were reconstructed, and the economy flourished. But Tiberius was a gloomy man, and eventually he lost any interest in ruling the empire. He retired and, unfortunately, delegated power to the most dishonest man, the prefect of Praetorian Guard named Sejanus. Sejanus used his influence to get rid of Tiberius's heirs: his son Drusus and the adopted son Germanicus. When Tiberius found out about these murders, he avenged them spectacularly. Maybe because of this, Tiberius became paranoid in his later years. He had many people killed—many of them entirely innocent—because they might have been traitors. Even two of Germanicus's sons were victims of the emperor's paranoia. One of his targets was a man called Gaius Asinius Gallus, whose biggest fault was that he married Vipsania Agrippina and had many sons with her. Tiberius controlled his jealousy while Vipsania was alive, but when she died, the emperor promptly made the unfortunate man a public enemy and let him die in prison.

Tiberius died an obnoxious death, and no one cared. He was poisoned and then strangled in bed. The man who organized the murder was Germanicus's third son, Caligula.

Caligula

Caligula was popular at first, thanks to his father's glory and because he reversed some of Tiberius's decisions. He permitted the people who had been banished from Rome to come home and restored public entertainments (they were costly and Tiberius was frugal, so he had canceled them).

During the first year of his reign, Caligula finished many public construction works and reduced taxes. He seemed competent, while in fact he was only spending the funds that Tiberius left in the treasury. He spent everything in less than a year, and then the problems emerged. Caligula became ruthless and had many people killed, including numerous senators and also his own mother and grandmother. He declared himself a god and enjoyed incestuous relationships with his three sisters, Agrippina, Drusilla, and Julia.

Caligula despised the ordinary people of Rome, and the people couldn't stand him. Eventually, the crowd hacked him to death during a public performance.

Caligula never named an heir and killed every potential one. For a brief moment, the Senate hoped that there would be no more emperors and that the Republic could be restored. The Praetorian Guard, however, had different plans.

Claudius

Caligula had nearly all his male relatives killed during his reign. However, he somehow spared his uncle Claudius, who had many physical handicaps and was perceived as the family idiot. Claudius was never permitted to a public office, let alone the army. But as the only one that survived, he was now the only legitimate heir to the throne. The Praetorian Guard found him and hailed him.

Claudius had spent 50 years hidden from the eyes of the public. But even though he wasn't presentable—he stammered, dribbled, and had a limp—he was extremely intelligent and well educated. Thanks to his knowledge of history, he knew he needed to reward the Praetorians generously to keep them loyal. He ended up being a considerably successful ruler, but he had a fatal weakness—the women in his life.

Claudius married four times. His fourth wife was Caligula's sister, Agrippina. Agrippina was only interested in helping her son Lucius (remembered in history as Nero) to the throne. She stood behind the conspiracies that involved killing everyone who stood in her way—including Claudius and his son, Britannicus. If only she knew what was coming, maybe she'd have thought twice about installing her underage son (it all happened before Nero's seventeenth birthday) to the throne of the Roman Empire.

Nero

Ancient sources offer contradictory accounts of the life and reign of Nero. Some sources depict this emperor as a mad egomaniac whom the people of Rome loathed so much that they celebrated when he got killed.[34] Other historians say that Nero was generous and popular, but he had many enemies within the Senate and elite.[35]

Nero was the youngest emperor from the Julio-Claudian dynasty, and the last one. While his mother had greater ambitions, Nero cared about the arts, sports, and his own popularity. At the beginning of his reign, the system that had been established under Claudius worked well. There were enough funds in the treasury for Nero to raise some public buildings and distribute help to the poor, but the underage emperor did not understand measure and started overspending. Eventually, he needed to raise taxes, which initiated a series of rebellions throughout the empire—and he wasn't capable of dealing with the tough situation.

Nero, Antiquario del Palatino.[36]

His mom wasn't of much help either. Instead of taking care of the unpleasant

duties of dealing with the unhappy populace, she was trying to micromanage Nero's private life. Agrippina was on great terms with Nero's wife Octavia, and both were trying and get rid of his mistress named Poppaea. Some historians even stated that Agrippina had planned to kill her son to avoid bad publicity, but in the end, she was murdered, along with her daughter-in-law Octavia.

The most memorable anecdote about Nero was about the Great Fire of Rome, which occurred in AD 64. The damage was enormous, as many public buildings and innumerable people's homes were burned to the ground. The contemporaries blamed the emperor for setting the fire, and he blamed and persecuted the Christians. The fact is that he needed such an incident, and he was so happy about it that he danced and sang.[37] Now he had a fantastic opportunity to show generosity, organize reparation works, distribute charity —and he finally had some first-class land in the center of Rome for his construction projects.

Nero had all his opponents killed—even those who hadn't really presented any genuine threat—and went to Greece. The emperor declared freedom for Greece and was allowed to win the Olympics, despite his poor performance and the falling of his chariot. Then he performed at the theatre, and not one of the spectators was allowed to leave. Meanwhile, a load of grain was delivered to Greece instead of Rome, causing a great famine in the Roman capital.

Everyone was unhappy about Nero's rule; the army mutinied and eventually the Praetorians joined them. The Senate declared the emperor an enemy of Rome. Nero realized nothing could save him, and he committed suicide—in a slightly complicated way. He ordered one servant to teach him by example how to kill himself, and he needed the assistance of another. While dying, he cried, "What an artist dies in me!" ("Qualis artifex pereo!")[38]

Chapter 8 – The Flavian Dynasty

Nero had no children and managed to get rid of literally everyone who could ever be considered as a legitimate heir. Now that he was dead, there was no one to succeed him. The lack of heirs resulted in civil war. During the course of one year—the year of the four emperors (AD 68–69)—three emperors rose and fell. The fourth emerged, ruled for a decade, and had two sons to follow him on the throne. His name was Vespasian, and he was the founder of the Flavian dynasty.

Vespasian

Vespasian was not of aristocratic origin. His parents were equestrians (the class of wealthy non-patrician families), and he and his brother managed to get promoted to senatorial rank. Vespasian was a consul in AD 51. He was also the brilliant military commander who led the army during the Roman invasion of Britain in AD 43 and subjugation of Judaea in AD 66. Vespasian was the governor of Judaea until AD 69, when the governors of other provinces supported him and helped him defeat the current emperor (an incompetent usurper named Vitellius who brought the empire to bankruptcy). By the end of the year, the Senate acknowledged Vespasian as the emperor of Rome.

This emperor was a hard worker, and he wasn't obsessed with magnificence. He introduced many necessary reforms, including a raise in taxes. The economy of the empire recovered, and the army was genuinely loyal to him. For the ten years of his reign, he erected many public buildings, including the Colosseum. He is remembered in a bright light, perhaps because he was, just like Augustus, well aware of the power of written word. He financed and protected Suetonius and Tacitus—the historians that literally created our views on the Roman world. They served his interests while he was alive, and when he died, they described the rule of his son Titus equally favorably.

Titus

Not surprisingly, contemporary historians depicted Titus as an ideal ruler. His military career began in Judaea, where he fought the rebelled Jews along with his father. When Vespasian went to Rome and became the emperor, Titus was in charge in Judaea, where he eventually beat any resistance and destroyed the city of Jerusalem, including the Second Temple. The treasure from the temple served the Flavians in erecting splendid buildings in Rome. Suetonius and others had more than one reason to celebrate this capable man, but Jewish sources described him as a ruthless persecutor.

Vespasian clearly favored Titus against his younger brother, Domitian. Titus was soon given all important functions in the empire—he was a consul alongside his father, the prefect of Praetorian Guard, and a tribune. The public was prepared for the seamless transition and, when Vespasian died, Titus was immediately proclaimed emperor.

Titus's reign was short but effective. He got rid of the network of spies called the *delatores*, who had been responsible for conspiracy theories and many political deaths in Rome for generations. The emperor ruled competently and had never killed a political opponent or confiscated any land. But Titus came to power at a very bad moment for Rome. After only a couple of months into his reign, Mount Vesuvius erupted and turned the surrounding cities into tombs. Pompeii and Herculaneum were buried with lava and stone. In other cities, people lost everything they had. To make it even worse, the catastrophe was followed by another great fire in Rome and, finally, plague. Titus helped all victims generously and financed finding a cure for the plague. But then he suddenly fell ill and died—not of plague but rather mysteriously—and his brother might have had something to do with it.

Domitian

Domitian hadn’t been included into the high politics of the empire and was mostly kept aside. However, now that both Vespasian and Titus (who only ruled for two years and died very young) were dead, he was the only man who could succeed them.

This ruler was an autocrat who cut the influence of the Senate, creating hostility between himself and the aristocracy. He estranged the historians that had served his father and brother so well. As a reaction, they loathed him and wrote that he was a ruthless and paranoid autocrat.

The fact is that Domitian ruled for 15 years and Rome was prosperous during that time. The emperor refrained from fighting expensive wars and instead focused on well-being within the empire. Follow Augustus’s steps, he reinforced the border defenses and led a great restoration program. Unlike the senators and historians, the common people of Rome probably loved him. The army admired him and remained loyal to him. However, this emperor was encircled by enemies and ended up being murdered by court officials. The Senate decided to remove his name and image from official history (*damnatio memoriae*). Throughout the empire, statues and inscriptions were redone or simply smashed. The elite relieved their anger, but this project was not completed thoroughly enough. We still know about the emperor whose competent rule provided a firm ground for another century of peace and prosperity.[39]

Chapter 9 - The Nerva-Antonine Dynasty

The dynasty that emerged after Domitian's death was quite an unusual one. With the exception of the first and the last emperor that belonged to this dynasty, everyone was adopted rather than biological heir to their predecessor. The five "adoptive" emperors are remembered as "the five good emperors." Machiavelli coined that phrase centuries ago. He praised the wisdom of those who chose their heirs by their competence rather than their blood, slightly overseeing the fact that those emperors had no choice, as they simply had no biological children.[40]

The Nerva-Antonines ruled Rome for most of the second century AD, which was marked by overall stability, partially thanks to the fact that their predecessors, the Flavians, ruled competently, and Domitian had left a considerable surplus in the treasury.

Nerva

After Domitian’s death, the Senate was once again tempted to restore the old constitution and not legitimize another emperor. But somewhere along the way, the elite began to enjoy the privileges without consequences. In times of crises, people blamed emperors, not senators. So now that the Flavians were history, the Senate and Praetorian Guard were searching for a particular kind of individual—competent and eligible, yet meek enough and without any biological heirs. They found Nerva, a long-time public official who was elected a consul at least twice in his career. Moreover, he was 65 and had no children who could make use of his emperorship.

Nerva was indeed moderate, even though some determination wouldn’t have hurt him. He spent a lot of money trying to get support from the populace, but the army never accepted him. First, he had no integrity in their eyes. Also, the Praetorians wanted him to execute Domitian’s murderers, which he lacked the strength to do. The situation got tense and it led to anarchy.

Nerva’s reign wasn’t going to last, and he needed to name an heir immediately. Neither the Senate nor the army cared whom he would love to see as his heir. It wasn’t up to him. The elite had already picked the next one. Nerva officially adopted the man and, shortly after that, died of a stroke. The next on the throne was one of the most important emperors in the history of Rome.

Trajan

Trajan was a charismatic military commander from southern Spain when, in AD 96 (the year of Domitian's death and the beginning of Nerva's reign), Nerva had appointed him to control Upper Germania. It was an extremely important assignment, and it involved great responsibility. In such situations, the custom required a sacrifice. Trajan went to the temple of Jupiter to make an offering, when something unexplainable happened. According to a legend, when he made it through the crowd and opened the temple doors, the multitude of voices shouted, "Imperator!"[41]

Emperor Trajan[42]

Trajan did not run to Rome when he found out about his adoption. He wanted to make sure everything was under his control, and first he had to take care about the army. Some of the Praetorians—those who presented the opposition against Nerva—could cause him trouble, so he sent them on special missions to keep them busy.

When the news spread that Nerva had died, it took Trajan a year to show up in the capital. He decided it was more important to go to the frontiers first because that's where the army was. Officially, he checked the borderlines to make sure they were safe from the outside enemies such as the Dacians. The truth is that he needed to establish good relations with the troops that were

loyal to the memory of Domitian and never accepted Nerva.

Eventually, in the summer of AD 99, Trajan unpretentiously entered Rome. He came on foot and joined the people who expected him. Everyone in Rome already admired Trajan and now his posture made him even more popular. His relationship with the Senate was excellent. However, he was the one who pulled all triggers. Trajan was a man of integrity and decisiveness and was described by many as an ideal ruler (*optimus princeps*).[43]

There were two main things in the way Trajan led Rome that contributed to such a brilliant reputation. First, he genuinely cared about public prosperity, he helped the poor, and he raised or restored innumerable buildings, bridges, aqueducts, and public baths. Many prisoners and exiles were rehabilitated, and everyone was encouraged to be useful. It all worked perfectly, and that was not all.

The second major thing that made this emperor rise above others was his military conquests. First, he managed to deal with the Dacians (who were quite powerful at the time and produced lots of hassle) and Parthians (the enemy from the East that Caesar wanted to fight just before his death[44]) for good. Then Trajan managed to expand the empire more than anyone else in the Roman history—from Scotland to the Caspian Sea.

The last days of his life Trajan spent dealing with rebellions on the east and north frontiers. Somewhere in between, he fell ill and died. Ancient historical sources are full of gossip, and some of them indicate that Trajan was homosexual and that his wife Pompeia Plotina and one of his putative lovers named Hadrian had poisoned the emperor.[45] We know for sure that Trajan made Hadrian his heir on his deathbed, and without any written document. The only witnesses to his will were his wife and the Praetorian Prefect Attianus—whom the aforementioned sources mention as Plotina’s lover. Be as it may, the emperor was dead and the next one was ready to take the throne.

Hadrian

To avoid another civil war, the Senate and military refrained from disputing the legitimacy of adoption. Still, many senators were executed without a trial. The man who was responsible for all those murders was Prefect Attianus—the very same man who maybe poisoned Trajan. Attianus was indeed powerful, and he believed he would direct Hadrian's rule, but the emperor replaced him as soon as he realized what was happening. Hadrian then promised the Senate he'd never have someone executed based on unsupported claims again.

Hadrian started his reign dealing with rebellions on the Roman frontiers, which were so stretched that they became hard to defend. Excessive expansion of Roman territory under Trajan had only brought problems, and Hadrian decided to go in the opposite direction. Just like Augustus, he cared about stability within the existing borders, so he stopped further expansion and even gave up Armenia and Mesopotamia. Hadrian reorganized the defenses, introduced strict military discipline, and built the famous Hadrian's Wall in Britain "to separate Romans from barbarians."[46]

People in the provinces loved this emperor because he not only gave them a lot of autonomy, but he also built and restored many buildings in cities throughout the empire. Greeks were happy about his efforts, but the people of Judaea were not. They did not want to be assimilated into the Graeco-Roman world, so when the Romans tried to build a temple to Jupiter on the ruins of an ancient Temple in Jerusalem, the Jews raised the Bar Kokhba revolt. Many died on both sides. Hadrian's army eventually crushed the opposition, and the consequences were terrible for the Jews. This was the moment in history when they lost their lands. Hadrian renamed the province of Judaea into Palestine (the ancient name of the land of Philistines—the people that disappeared from history centuries earlier) and combined it with Syria. The new province was named Syria Palestine (or Syria Palaestina), Jerusalem became Aelia Capitolina, and the people were taken into slavery.

Hadrian was a Graecophile, a lover of Greek culture and arts—and of one particular young Greek named Antinous. Contemporary sources reveal that the emperor was so overwhelmed by his lover's premature death that he wept like a woman.[47] He, of course, had a wife, but his marriage was unhappy. Hadrian died of heart failure, and the title of Roman emperor went to his adopted son Antoninus.

Antoninus Pius

Antoninus was Hadrian’s third choice—the man he intended to adopt had already died and the second one, Marcus Aurelius, was too young. Antoninus was there to close the gap, rule a couple of years, and be succeeded by Aurelius. To everyone’s surprise, Antoninus ruled for 23 years, and those years were peaceful and prosperous. Because of his piety and gratefulness, he was remembered as Antoninus Pius.

Antoninus continued with Hadrian’s policies, but he did it a bit differently. He was in Rome most of the time, allowing the loyal military leaders to take care of occasional conflicts on the borders. He also freed a number of men who had been imprisoned during his predecessor’s reign, stating that Hadrian would have set them free them himself if he had the chance.

The frugal emperor took great care of public finances, and he could afford his many construction projects, such as the memorial temples of his wife Faustina and his benefactor Hadrian, and the impressive Antonine Wall in Scotland.

Marcus Aurelius

Antoninus Pius had two sons and many daughters with Faustina, but almost all of them predeceased him. In terms of succession, it didn't make any difference. His successors were determined more than two decades earlier. They were Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. The two men ruled jointly until Verus's death, when Aurelius declared his son Commodus a co-emperor.

Aurelius was marked as last of the five good emperors by Machiavelli. Best known as a philosopher and one of the most important ideologues of stoicism, as well as the author of *Meditations*, Aurelius epitomized the Platonic ideal of the philosopher king. He used his power wisely in order to help people rather than to help himself.

No matter how much he appreciated life in contemplation, this emperor was a competent war commander who spent many years on the battlefields, fighting barbarian tribes on the Danube frontier. He was just about to defeat the Parthians when he died at Vindobona in present-day Austria.

Commodus

Marcus Aurelius died in AD 180, leaving his teenage son to rule alone. It was a particularly difficult moment in history. Year after year, the enemies on the borders grew stronger. The Roman army was making a great effort to prevent an invasion. On top of that, Commodus was underage and incompetent to rule the empire.

The son of Marcus Aurelius had received the finest education possible and was expected to rule wisely. However, he turned up to be a senseless egomaniac. Commodus fought with gladiators (of course, no one was permitted to harm him) and loved to be depicted as Hercules. He let a few opportunists lead Rome and turn it into chaos. Consulships were literally sold; people were getting killed for ridiculous reasons, and the economy of the empire was in jeopardy. The emperor didn't care. Ruling the state was boring for him, and he wanted to make it more fun. His creative ideas included renaming the empire to Commodiana, executing the consuls, and replacing them with gladiators. Providentially, the Praetorian prefect found out about it and arranged for the mad emperor to be poisoned. The task was difficult. Commodus's mistress offered him a glass of poisoned wine, which he eagerly accepted. But he was already so drunk that he vomited the wine up. Poisoning was not so good idea after all, and the conspirators had to go ahead with the plan B, which was strangling the emperor to death. Commodus's personal trainer did it successfully.

Many historians have marked the period of Commodus's reign as the very moment when Rome ceased to be a highly organized society and an invincible super force and turned into a kingdom "of iron and rust."[48] Many accounts of ancient Rome stop here, but this one continues. The Roman Empire did not fall in the second century AD. It lasted for hundreds of years after the reign of Commodus and was yet to see many moments of glory under some of its most visionary rulers, such as Diocletian and Constantine.

Chapter 10 – Late Empire

The Nerva-Antonine dynasty ended with the death of Commodus. A period of great uncertainty began, and it lasted for an entire century. The throne of Rome was in the hands of many usurpers who came to power by killing their predecessors. All of them ended in the same fashion: killed by the next emperor or the Praetorian Guard. Most of the third century AD remained known as the Crisis of the Third Century or the Imperial Crisis. Roman troops fought each other in order to install their generals on top of the state, while barbarian hordes hit the borders. Twenty-nine emperors rose and fell in only five decades, pushing the empire into further turmoil. Finally, one soldier-turned-emperor decided to put a stop to further decay and enable a period of stability.

Diocletian and the Tetrarchy

Just like many before him, Diocletian ended up on the throne thanks to his troops, by killing the previous emperor and crushing his army. Unlike his predecessors, he wasn’t blinded by power. He understood that one man couldn't efficiently control the Roman Empire in its entirety—especially not in chaotic circumstances that characterized the third century AD. So he split it in half.

Diocletian was now in charge on the eastern (mainly Greek) part of the empire, and he gave his friend Maximian the control over the western (Latin) part. The administration worked so efficiently that the emperor came to the idea to further divide each half of the empire and establish the tetrarchy (the rule of four). Diocletian and Maximian both had the titles of Roman emperor (August), while the two new tetrarchs, called Galerius and Constantius Chlorus (“the Pale”), were given the titles of junior emperors (Caesar).

Diocletian introduced various reforms and brought order into the army, administration, and tax system. He also acknowledged that the Augustan model of empire that relied on the institutions of the republic no longer functioned. The Principate ended and the new model, called Dominate, began. The new emperor was dressed in gold, wore a crown, and was presented as the embodiment of Jupiter on Earth. Traditional Roman (pagan) religion supported this, as rulers had been deified for centuries. The populace was required to venerate Diocletian as the embodiment of Jupiter on Earth and to make ceremonial sacrifices to him.

His pagan subjects gladly followed the new rules. After all, this was the emperor who restored stability after a century of terrible conditions. But by this point, there were a significant number of Christians in the empire, and for Diocletian they meant trouble. Even though they were model citizens who served the army and paid taxes, they were persistently refusing to make a sacrifice to the emperor. For them, there was only one God, and it was not the emperor.

Angry because of this undermining of his imperial authority, Diocletian decided to terminate Christianity in the empire. Churches were demolished, writings were burned, and people were captured, banished, or killed. Neither repression nor propaganda produced the results he wanted. It was just the opposite. Christianity grew stronger than ever, and Diocletian was under such pressure that he stepped down from the throne.

When Diocletian abdicated in AD 305, his colleague had to follow his example. Both emperors retired and left their authorities to Galerius and Constantius, who, in turn, had to name new junior emperors. The trouble emerged from the fact that Constantius and Maximian had sons. Both of them were established generals, and both were left out, while some new men got promoted to junior emperors.

The End of Tetrarchy

Compared to other tetrarchs, Constantius the Pale was the most popular one. He was honest, just, and down-to-earth. Unlike others, he never persecuted Christians or anyone else, and his army was a diverse one in terms of religion. However, he was dying. His paleness was not metaphorical—he was ill with leukemia. He died during a campaign in Britain and was mourned sincerely by his soldiers. His army was informed that they would now serve the new emperor, called Severus. Most of them had never heard of Severus. They were loyal to Constantius and his son named Constantine, who often joined his father in campaigns. The soldiers knew him, admired him—and declared him their emperor. The short-lived period of peaceful transition established under Diocletian had come to an end.

Constantine Takes the West…

Maximian's son, Maxentius, loved the idea of seizing power the way Constantine did, and so he employed the troops that used to serve his father and captured Rome. At that moment, the Roman Empire had six emperors: the four legal ones and two self-proclaimed. By AD 312, only the "illegal" ones were left in the western half of the empire.

Maxentius never intended to cooperate with Constantine. Rome and the rest of Italy were his. He had a huge army and numerous defenses. But Maxentius was a cruel and unpopular ruler, and his army did not cherish him the way Constantine's men valued their leader. So when Constantine and his forty thousand men invaded Italy, Maxentius and his troops fled the city.

The two forces met at the Milvian Bridge, and Constantine crushed his opponent. He later claimed Christ guided him. The next day, Rome got a new leader. Constantine entered the city proudly holding his opponent's head on a spear. He was now the emperor of the Western Roman Empire, and it was just the beginning for this visionary ruler.

There was something special about Constantine, something that granted him enormous popularity. He marched into Rome as a savior, rather than as an oppressor like Maxentius. He was a people's man. Furthermore, in such delicate times when Christians were oppressed throughout the empire, he picked Christ rather than Jupiter, and refused to make the customary offering to the old pagan god. But Constantine didn't just turn sides. The emperor legalized Christianity through an edict of toleration in 313, but he made sure not to alienate his pagan subjects, and did not make a new religion the official one. He has been seen ever since as a pioneer of religious toleration.

…and the East

While Constantine and Maxentius fought in the Western Empire, something similar happened in the Eastern Empire as well. Licinius—one of the legit tetrarchs at first, and now the sole ruler of the East—had already beaten his competition and had his junior emperor, Valerius Valens, killed. Constantine was his only threat, but the two emperors made a deal, and each was in charge of their own half of the empire. But quiet hostility grew to the point when conflict became inevitable.

Licinius made a fatal mistake. There were even more Christians in the eastern half of the empire than in the western, and Licinius believed they would all support Constantine. Because of that, he started persecuting his subjects. This gave a perfect opportunity for Constantine to show up as the protector of people, so he came with an army and attacked Licinius. The armies met near Byzantium, which was still just a minor Greek colony and was yet to become the center of the known universe and, naturally, Constantine won.

Chapter 11 – The Empire of Constantine

For the first time in recent history, the entire Roman Empire had a single emperor. Constantine was competent and strong enough to take on the responsibility. It wasn't easy. Frequent civil wars had destabilized the empire, and Constantine carried out a number of reforms to make everything function as it should. The economy was recovering, thanks to the fact that the working classes could work again instead of going to wars. To speed up the recuperation, Constantine locked everyone within their occupations. The farmers could not leave their land, and the members of guilds (whole families) could not change profession. Such drastic measures had a different effect in the eastern and western halves of the empire. The East was already stable and thriving, and those orders were largely ignored. In the West, however, the reforms resulted in the medieval feudal system.

Since there was no one left who could dispute his position on the throne, Constantine went a little further in fostering Christianity. First he sent his mother on the very first pilgrimage in history, during which she founded many churches, such as the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Golgotha in Jerusalem, and numerous hostels and hospitals along the way. The next step in promoting the new faith included the banishment of ritual sacrifice, orgies, and gladiatorial games. The practice of crucifixion also became forbidden. The only popular public spectacle that was still allowed was the chariot race because it wasn't violent.

The First Heretics: the Arians

Constantine thoroughly transformed the empire, and its link with Christianity was now unbreakable. Everything appeared sorted out when a new challenge appeared. A brilliantly persuasive young priest from Egypt started teaching his own views on Jesus Christ. The priest's name was Arius, and he believed that Christ was not a god in a true sense and that he was inferior to God the Father. Arius attracted many followers, and they remained at his side even when a new bishop was appointed to replace him in Alexandria. This situation threatened to break the church, which was still decentralized and not organized properly.

The official opinion of the church did not exist as such—and it was just about time for the church to consolidate and express its views. The future of the empire depended on it, and it was Constantine who initiated finding a permanent solution. As he was interested in social stability rather than theology, he offered simple solutions, such as working out the differences. When there was no response to his appeal, he gathered a great council in Nicaea, where he confronted all bishops in the empire. The majority decided that Arius was wrong, and he was excommunicated from the church. Thanks to Constantine, Christianity was now united, but the harmony was provisional and wasn't going to last. It didn't make any difference for the emperor, who was already preparing for one of his greatest projects.

Building Constantinople (New Rome)

Now that Constantine had dealt with the delicate issues, he decided it was time for some remarkable construction works. He made an astonishing basilica in Rome, with a large statue of himself inside, and a few other churches, including one for the pope.

Nevertheless, Constantine did not want to rule from Rome. The city was not that important strategically anymore, and it contained visible traces of degeneration and corruption. Rome was the city of the past, and Constantine imagined a city of the future. The empire had changed a lot during his reign, and he thought it deserved a new capital—a New Rome (Nova Roma).

It wasn't easy to find the perfect ground for such endeavor, but Constantine, as he later claimed, was led by divine voice. God led him to the very place where he crushed Licinius and became the emperor of both East and West: the ancient city of Byzantium.

This thousand-years-old Greek colony was sited on a perfect spot just between the eastern and western edges of the empire. Bordered on three sides with water, it had excellent natural defenses. The city's large harbor was located between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, at the midpoint of lucrative trade routes. The place was so perfect—and later history would attest to it—that it is a true wonder why no one before Constantine had come to the idea to build a capital on that spot.

Constantine employed all available resources and the magnificent new city emerged within the period of just six years. People from all regions of the empire were glad to move to New Rome and enjoy the various benefits, such as free grain and fresh water, as well as the chance of improvement of their status.

The new capital was dedicated in AD 330. During the rule of Constantine, it was referred to as New Rome. A century later, the official name was Constantinople, and it remained so until the twentieth century when it was changed to Istanbul. In the present day, the city is the capital of Turkey.

The Last Years of Constantine the Great: A Dark Secret, Baptism, and Death

In the later period of his reign, it wasn't easy for Constantine to preserve political and religious harmony. He became an oppressive ruler and utilized severe and sometimes unjust measures to return some prosperity. He was efficient in doing so, but he also grew ruthless. He killed many who, no matter how slightly, appeared as his potential rivals.

Constantine couldn't tolerate other people's popularity, and there was one man whom the masses loved and wanted to see on the throne. The emperor had him killed too, under false accusations. The unfortunate man was named Crispus, and he was the emperor's oldest son.

No matter how hard he tried, Constantine couldn't keep everything under control. He had many issues with the church. Even though he had the means to influence the official doctrine established in Nicaea, the opinions and faith of his subjects were beyond his power. Arius and other heretics gained the support of people who did not care whether those priests were banished from the church. Even Constantine himself was never completely sure which faction within the church he should support. Disinterested in theological speculation, he only wanted to back up the most popular one so that it would help him spread his influence. It seems that near the end of his life he thought the Arians would win, so when he was finally baptized, it was an Arian bishop who performed the ceremony.

Chapter 12 – Constantinian Dynasty

Constantine was one of the most competent rulers in Roman history, but he was still far from perfect. Some issues that he left unsolved became major problems after he died. The old Roman religion persisted along with Christianity. This model of religious tolerance worked well under Constantine, but now it threatened to break the empire apart. The other unsolved issue was the one of succession.

Constantine’s Sons

Constantine was so concerned about his own position that he arranged the execution of his most skilled heir, as we saw in the previous chapter. The three sons that survived, named Constantine II, Constantius II, and Constans, split the empire among themselves and immediately started fighting each other in order to take the whole. After a couple of years of civil war, Constantius II emerged victoriously. But the empire had many enemies that grew stronger year after year, and he wasn’t able to be present at all frontiers at the same time. He desperately needed someone from his family to lead the rest of the army, but he had expediently killed them all. Well, almost all, as there was a nerdy little cousin Julian whom Constantius spared because the boy didn’t seem to be much of a threat. The emperor would think differently, had he only known what potential young Julian had.

Julian the Apostate

Flavius Claudius Julianus (later known as Julian the Apostate) spent his childhood imprisoned in his home, reading the Greek and Roman classics, as a child. He had never shown any ambitions other than intellectual ones, and when he turned 19, he was easily granted the permission to travel and pursue his studies of the classical world. During his journeys from Pergamum to Ephesus, Julian studied philosophy, rejected Christianity, and embraced Neoplatonism. He never told anyone—especially his Christian teachers—about his apostasy and joining a pagan movement because he didn't want to compromise the privileges that he enjoyed.

But the moment had come when he could no longer continue his life as a scholar. Constantius needed him to lead an imperial army and deal with enemies on the northern frontier, as the emperor himself had to fight Persia. So, he made Julian his Caesar (junior emperor), gave him 360 men (who, according to Julian's words, "knew only how to pray"[49]), and directed him to Gaul.

Julian had zero military experience. In the eyes of others, he was just a shy scholar. Yet in the five years he spent in Gaul, he showed incredible results. Julian organized the local army and made it efficient, then pushed out the barbarians, and set dozens of thousands of war prisoners free. When he established peace in the province, he pursued and crushed the Germanic tribes in their own terrain, imprisoned their king, and sent him to Constantinople in chains.

Constantius was instantly petrified. His young cousin was powerful and people admired him. To discourage Julian, the emperor demanded money and men from Gaul to be sent to him as a help against the Persians.

Julian's men did not want to abandon their homes and join Constantius's army on the east, so one night they gathered around Julian's palace, hailed him as their emperor, and asked him to lead them against Constantius. Julian felt Zeus was on his side, and he gladly said yes. He no longer had to pretend he was Christian, and he sent instructions to all Roman cities to restore Roman religion.

Julian didn't have to fight Constantius, who died of an illness in the meantime. As his only heir, the new emperor Julian simply arrived in Constantinople, where he was hailed wholeheartedly by the crowds as well as the Senate.

Restoring Graeco-Roman Culture: Julian's Futile Dreams

Julian wasn't completely content with his new status. The strength of the empire had declined considerably over the ages. He saw degeneration, greed, moral decay, and a lack of discipline everywhere. The emperor had a clear idea of the causes of such a decline: it all happened because of Christianity. The new faith glorified 'feminine' attributes such as kindness and forgiveness, at the expense of the long-established Roman sense of honor and duty.

Julian knew that persecution wouldn't produce the results that he wanted. So he decided to adopt Constantine's strategy, but for an opposite cause—the restoration of old customs and religions that were now considered pagan. Julian published an edict of toleration, which contained a small clause which stated that Roman paganism was a superior religion. Temples throughout the empire were open again, and everything was set up, but the populace had already acknowledged Christ as their true God and wasn't willing to abandon the new hope. No matter how hard the emperor tried to reverse the course of history, nothing seemed to work. Then he remembered how Constantine made Christianity dominant overnight—he fought at the Milvian Bridge and won, stating that Christ had led him. The next step was clear: Julian had to emerge glorious in a decisive battle, and people should be informed that Mars and Jupiter (or the Greek Ares and Zeus) led their emperor.

Julian the Apostate[50]

Julian prepared for the key victory in a traditional Graeco-Roman way by asking the oracle at Delphi for a prophecy. But the words of the oracle were

disappointing: “Tell the emperor that my hall has fallen to the ground. Phoibos no longer has his house, nor his mantic bay, nor his prophetic spring; the water has dried up.” [51]

The emperor made several other attempts to prove that ancient gods were real and on his side, while the Christian God was an impostor. According to a biblical prophecy, the ancient Jewish temple in Jerusalem couldn’t be rebuilt until the end times. So Julian decided to rebuild the temple and prove it all a lie. But he didn’t manage to do it. He made two attempts, and each of them ended with a catastrophe. First it was an earthquake, and the second time it was a fire that burned the entire structure to the ground.

These futile attempts made Julian increasingly unpopular, mainly because he needed means to achieve them, and he used the gold from a Christian cathedral to pay his army.

Finally, in 363, he marched to Persia with his impressive army. They entered the Persian land without difficulty, but it was impossible to get across high walls and break into the Persian capital of Ctesiphon. A long siege was out of the question, as the Romans couldn’t stand the heat. On top of that, a large Persian army was on its way to defend the capital. Disappointed, Julian decided to abandon the siege. Then in a couple of months, the Persians attacked the eastern frontier, and Julian instantly received a fatal wound. He died as the last pagan Roman Emperor and the last emperor from the Constantinian dynasty.

Chapter 13 – Decline and Fall of the Western Roman Empire

The world was changing rapidly, and Rome was soon to fall into the hands of Germanic leaders. Germanic tribes had been trying to invade Roman land for ages, without success. This time it was different; they came in peace, as settlers who sought refuge from the new frightening force—the Huns. Nevertheless, the newcomers weren't eager to adapt and embrace the Roman culture. As a result, Roman society was changing forever, in a way that was not beneficial to the Romans. On top of that, the empire was governed by one incompetent emperor after another.[52]

Valentinian, Valens, and Gratian

The emperor that succeeded Julian died an unheroic death: a brazier was left burning in his tent overnight and he suffocated. His sons, Valentinian and Valens, split the empire again. Valentinian took the West and Valens became the ruler of Roman East. After eleven years, Valentinian died and his son Gratian succeeded him, but he was too inexperienced and under the influence of his uncle Valens.

Valens made a seemingly favorable arrangement with the two hundred thousand Visigoth and Ostrogoth migrants who wanted to stay in the Roman territory. The settlers would be given properties in Thrace, and their men would become Roman soldiers. But it did not end well. The hostility between the natives and the novices intensified. In 378, Valens and Gratian were compelled to attack the Goths near Adrianople. They lacked a proper plan and genuine collaboration, and the action turned out to be a catastrophe. The long walk and heat drained the Romans, and the Goths easily slew two-thirds of them. Now every barbaric tribe could enter the Roman territory and do whatever they wanted. The Goths spread east and menaced Constantinople. It looked like there was no way out.

Theodosius

Valens died in a skirmish, but the East was not without an emperor for long. Western emperor Gratian chose his best general, Theodosius, and made him the emperor of the eastern half of the empire. Theodosius had a truly difficult task to find some fresh blood to replace tens of thousands of experienced soldiers that had been slaughtered at the Adrianople disaster. Now everyone —including the barbarians—had to serve in the army. The arrangement he made was similar to the one made by Valens, but Theodosius paid more attention to the details. It worked well for a while, although it left damaging consequences that would become obvious in a few decades and would result in the collapse of the Western Roman Empire.

Exclusiveness of Christianity

In 382 Theodosius fell ill, and he thought he was about to die. Just like Constantine before him, the eastern emperor wanted to be baptized before he expired. However, after the ceremony, he miraculously recovered. This experience prompted him to change the way he ruled the empire. Killing innocents was now impossible, and he no longer could ignore the disputes within the church.

Theodosius banned both the Arian heresy and paganism within the empire. Incited by his religious mentor, Bishop Ambrose of Milan, he closed the public temples, renounced the title of Pontifex Maximus (the chief priest of the traditional Roman religion), and outlawed all things pagan. The Olympic Games, the Delphic Oracle, the Temple of Vesta, and the eternal fire were now history. Eventually, in 391, Theodosius officially announced Christianity as the only religion in the empire.

The Sack of Rome

Theodosius’s descendants lacked the capacity to deal with the ‘barbaric’ forces in the empire, and those tribes enlarged their influence. Generals—who more often than not had a barbaric origin—enjoyed greater influence than emperors. This was particularly obvious in the western part of the empire, where Emperor Honorius was effectively in the shadow of General Stilicho. Ironically, Stilicho was an outstanding commander, yet neither the elite in Rome nor Constantinople supported him. On one occasion, he tried to bribe the Visigothic King Alaric because he realized fighting him would be detrimental. Stilicho's enemies then convinced Emperor Honorius that he had betrayed Rome, and the emperor had him killed. Italy was virtually defenseless, and in 401, Alaric’s army simply entered Italy and sacked Rome. Honorius escaped to Ravenna, leaving the citizens to fend for themselves.

The Horrifying Huns

Shocked by the sack of Rome, the new emperor of the East, Theodosius II, built massive walls around Constantinople. Alaric did not have a chance to try to invade the New Rome, but others did, including the mighty Attila the Hun and his menacing army. Constantinople remained unharmed, but Rome was utterly exposed. At first, Attila accepted payment in order to leave the Romans alone, and so he did. A few months later, Honorius's sister Honoria was pressed into a marriage with an unpleasant senator. Desperately trying to avoid the wedding, she sent a letter and a ring to Attila. The powerful Hun then returned to take what was his. Surprisingly, the Huns did not ruin the city. Pope Leo—the only public official who was still in Roma at this point—persuaded him to leave immediately. The next morning, Attila's men found their leader dead in his tent.

Resisting Barbarian Masters

Attila now expired, the Huns no longer presented a threat to the Roman Empire. However, the true enemy was still present and had immense power. The barbarians were not only integrated into the society; they were just behind the throne, effectively controlling the emperors. When Emperor Valentinian III tried to put an end to it and get rid of his barbarian master, he was murdered too. The emperor's widow then called for the Vandals to come and help Romans. They arrived, pillaged Rome, and took the unwise empress with them to Carthage.

In Constantinople, Emperor Leo wanted to resist the Sarmatian general Aspar – who effectively ruled that part of the empire- but also avoid ending up like his western colleague. Leo found a way to take the military control from him and give it to another general, Tarasicodissa the Isaurian. They charged Aspar with treason, and Tarasicodissa—now Hellenized and named Zeno—was married to Leo's daughter.

Leo was an ambitious emperor, and he wanted to subjugate the Vandal kingdom of North Africa. He equipped the army well but made a colossal mistake with the choice of the commander in charge. He chose his brother-in-law Basiliscus, who soon proved to be among the most incapable generals in history. He landed too far from Carthage, accidentally wrecked the fleet, panicked, and fled, leaving the devastated army behind. Interestingly, Basiliscus believed he was competent to rule the empire. Leo chose Zeno as his heir. Basiliscus caused him some trouble by overthrowing him, but the people were on Zeno's side, and the better man won the throne.

The West Falls. The East Moves On.

Zeno worked diligently to re-establishing stability in the Eastern Roman Empire, but the West was doomed. In 476, a barbarian general named Odoacer got bored by all the pretending and puppet-emperors, and he sent the teenage Emperor Romulus Augustulus into exile. The barbarian ruler wasn't interested in taking the title of Roman emperor, and he took the crown and scepter and sent them as a gesture of good will to Zeno.

The Eastern Emperor wasn't happy to give Odoacer support, but he couldn't afford to fight him at that moment. Eventually, he came up with a brilliant idea and solved two problems at once. The Ostrogoth King Theodoric was making a mess in the Balkans, and Zeno couldn't fight him. So he gave him the authority to rule the West. The Goths collectively moved to Italy and overthrew Odoacer. Rome wasn't Roman anymore. The Eastern Empire, on the other hand, finally became free from barbaric influence. Zeno was successful in restoring stability but didn't live long enough to witness the bright new era that began thanks to him.

Chapter 14 – The Byzantine Millennium

The city of Constantinople was founded during the chaotic third century when revolts and civil wars were normal, and Roman emperors merely lasted for a year. Under Constantine, the new city had become the capital of the whole Roman Empire. Now that the Western Roman Empire ceased to exist, the Eastern Empire was the only one. Today it is widely known as the Byzantine Empire, but at the time when these events took place, it was formally known as the Eastern Roman Empire. The citizens of the eastern capital and its rulers saw themselves as Romans. Everybody else, including their enemies, considered them Roman as well. When Constantinople fell to the Ottomans, the Sultan Mehmed II took the title Caesar of Rome. But that happened in the fifteenth century, in the period that could not be named "ancient" by any stretch of thoughts. We'll address it though, because of its continuity with the ancient Roman world. As for now, our story continues with the most glorious Byzantine emperor and his controversial wife.

Justinian and Theodora

Justinian had been truly powerful years before he became emperor. Born as Peter Sabbatius, this promising young man changed his name to Justinian out of the gratitude he felt toward his uncle Justin, who happened to be the emperor at the time. Justin not only adopted his nephew and helped him receive elite education, he also listened to his advice and allowed him to make strategically important decisions. The elderly emperor even gave Justinian his consent when he decided to marry “a lady of the stage” named Theodora.

Justinian helped the neighboring peoples to deal with their oppressive masters. Representatives from numerous states gathered in Constantinople, and the city practically became the center of the world. The vassal kings that had been obliged to serve the king of Persia happily changed sides, empowered by the support from the empire and Justinian. Besides, the troops led by Justinian’s bodyguard, Belisarius, overtook Armenia from the Persians. This was just the beginning for the visionary emperor.

The Coronation of Justinian and Theodora in Hagia Sofia was spectacular, and it anticipated an age of splendor. Indeed, his reign is now considered the golden age in Byzantine history, thanks to his military achievements and magnificent construction projects. In addition to that, he produced the first ever written codex of Roman law. Unfortunately, the people were not very happy because he also raised taxes. That’s why he almost got killed in the Nika revolt, when 30,000 people raised against him at the Hippodrome. The revolt was suppressed and the rioters slaughtered by Belisarius’s army. No one ever questioned Justinian’s decisions again.

One God in Heaven, One Emperor on Earth

Justinian believed the Roman Empire was not complete without the city of Rome and that it was his duty to restore the heavenly order, liberate Rome, and reunite the church. Luckily for the emperor, he had the finest general in Roman history at his disposal. Although hugely outnumbered, the army led by Belisarius defeated the Vandals in Africa and reconquered Carthage. After that, with only 5,000 men he retook Rome and all of Italy. He might have been able to reconquer Spain and the rest of Western Europe if only the empress had not feared that Belisarius was too powerful to be trusted.

Later years brought plague and famine. After all was over, Justinian managed to uphold relative prosperity and peace for the rest of his life. No Roman Emperor spoke Latin as his first language after Justinian, and very few were such visionaries in the whole of Roman history.[53]

For the rest of its long history, the Eastern Roman Empire had its ups and downs. One of the greatest challenges was the aggressive expansion of Muslim tribes, which able Byzantine generals fought numerous times. Even in times of greatest crisis, Constantinople was well protected and unapproachable for its enemies. The official language was Greek, and the dominant religion was Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Despite being a religious society, its educational system was remarkably secular. Its cultural life flourished, and the elites of the surrounding peoples were educated at the University of Constantinople, where they learned mathematics, rhetoric, languages, and law. The Dark Ages never entered Byzantium. Constantinople was the shield of light and civilization in Medieval Europe and beyond.[54] Moreover, the Eastern Empire guarded the rest of Europe against swiftly expanding Islamic forces.[55]

The Crusades

The dominance of Byzantium lasted for more than a millennium, but eventually it came to an end. Ironically, the first damage made to Constantinople did not come from the hands of Muslims. The city that had not been conquered before was eventually sacked and burned by fellow Christians during the Fourth Crusade.

The trouble began in the eleventh century, during the advancement of Seljuk Turks who invaded the imperial territory in order to stay there. The Byzantine elite was so corrupt at the time that they betrayed the emperor Romanus Diogenes in a decisive moment during a battle against the Seljuks, only because they did not want a strong emperor who could limit their privileges. Like centuries ago in ancient times, the empire was now tormented by civil wars. Eventually, in 1081, a man with potential was crowned. It was the general Alexius Comnenus.

By this point, the Orthodox and Catholic churches were separated and not in good terms. Nevertheless, Alexius wrote to Pope Urban asking for support against the Saracens. That’s how the crusades began.

The first crusaders that arrived were an undisciplined bunch led by Peter the Hermit. On the way to Constantinople, they set fire to many towns, and when they arrived, they killed a number of Greeks in Asia Minor. Finally, the Turks crushed them. The next crusades were more successful in their mission, as they won several battles against the Turks and entered Jerusalem. Still, they presented a much bigger danger to the striking city of Constantinople than to the Muslims. The Fourth Crusade never reached its holy destination. The knights and peasants entered Constantinople. The Duke of Venice, who had some unresolved issues with the Byzantine elite, told the crusaders that the Greeks were heretics. As a result, they ruined the city and took all the treasure they could find, including reliquaries from the tombs and the ornaments from the churches. In the end, they burned the city.

After being condemned by Pope Innocent, the crusaders decided to stay and create the Latin Empire of Constantinople. The genuine Byzantine elite and the new emperor were located in Nicaea, and they undermined the Latins with various diplomatic activities until one day emperor Michael Palaeologus gathered an army, entered Constantinople, and made the Latins panic and run away.

The Ottomans

A group of Turkish warriors led by a man named Osman conquered all other cities in the empire, and now they aimed at Constantinople. The city's defenses could buy time, but they weren't that unbreakable anymore. The emperor Manuel II asked support from the West, but no one came. The tension lasted for several decades, during which the Ottomans suffered some setbacks and left the Byzantines alone for a while.

Finally, in 1453, the Turkish Sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror, armed with modern cannons, opened fire on the city walls. The offensive lasted for 48 days. Finally, the Turkish army backed up by elite troops called the Janissaries entered the city from the sea. Many citizens gathered in Hagia Sophia, waiting for an angel to save them. They were all killed. It was the end of Roman history.

Hagia Sophia today (adapted into a mosque), Istanbul, Turkey[56]

The Timeline of Roman History

Ancient History: the Roman Republic

753 BC Foundation of Rome
509 BC Overthrow of the Roman monarchy
494 BC First secession of plebs
445 BC The legalization of marriage between patricians and plebeians
396 BC Roman soldiers earned a salary for the first time
366 BC The first plebeian consul held office
351 BC The first plebeian dictator and censor were elected
343-41 BC The First Samnite War
340-38 BC Latin (Social) War
337 BC The first plebeian Praetor was elected
328-304 BC The Second Samnite War
287 BC Conflict of the Orders: the first secession of plebs
280-272 BC Pyrrhic War
241 BC First Punic War: Sicily was organized as the province of Sicilia
218 BC Second Punic War: A Carthaginian army departed Cartagena
216 BC Battle of Cannae
214-205 BC First Macedonian War
204-201 BC Second Punic War
200-192 BC Second Macedonian War
188 BC Roman–Seleucid War:
149-146 BC Third Punic War
133 BC Murder of the Tribune of the Plebs Tiberius Gracchus
112 BC Jugurthine War
107 BC Gaius Marius was elected consul
91-88 BC Social War
88 BC Sulla's first civil war
83-82 BC Sulla's second civil war
3C Pompey conquered Jerusalem; Cicero was elected consul; Catilinarian conspiracy
59 BC The First Triumvirate

50 BC Gallic Wars: Roman forces barred the westward migration of the Helvetii across the Rhône

49 BC Caesar illegally crossed the Rubicon

44 BC Assassination of Julius Caesar

C The Second Triumvirate of Augustus, Mark Antony and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus

C Liberators' civil war: Augustus and Antony led some thirty legions to northern Greece in pursuit of Caesar's assassins

33 BC The Second Triumvirate expired

31 BC Battle of Actium

C Final War of the Roman Republic: Antony's forces defected to Augustus. Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide

Early Empire

3C The Senate granted Augustus the titles Augustus, majestic, and Princeps, first

3C Augustus married his daughter Julia to his general Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa

12 BC Agrippa died of fever

11 BC Augustus married Julia to Tiberius

9 BC Nero Claudius Drusus died from injuries sustained falling from a horse

2 Augustus offered Tiberius tribunician power and imperium over the eastern half of the Empire. Tiberius refused, announcing his retirement to Rhodes

2 Augustus was acclaimed Pater Patriae, father of the country, by the Senate; Augustus convicted Julia of adultery and treason and exiled her with her mother Scribonia to Ventotene

AD 4 Augustus adopted Tiberius as his son and granted him tribunician power

AD 13 Tiberius was granted power equal to Augustus as co-princeps

AD 14 Augustus died

16 Battle of the Weser River: A Roman army led by Germanicus decisively defeated a Germanic force on the Weser

AD 18 Tiberius granted Germanicus imperium over the eastern half of the Empire

19 Germanicus died in Antioch, possibly after being poisoned on Tiberius's orders

37 Tiberius died, and his will left his offices jointly to Caligula and Drusus Julius Caesar's son, his grandson Tiberius Gemellus

41 Caligula was assassinated by the centurion Cassius Chaerea; The Praetorian Guard acclaimed Nero Claudius Drusus's son Claudius princeps

AD 43 Roman conquest of Britain

AD 49 Claudius married Agrippina the Younger

AD 50 Claudius adopted Agrippina's son Nero

54 Claudius died after being poisoned by Agrippina, and Nero succeeded him as princeps

AD 64 Great Fire of Rome

66 First Jewish–Roman War: The Jewish population of Judea revolted against Roman rule

68 The Senate declared Nero an enemy of the state, and he orders his secretary Epaphroditos to kill him; the Senate accepted Galba, governor of Hispania Tarraconensis, as ruler of Rome

69 The Praetorian Guard assassinated Galba and acclaimed Otho ruler of Rome; Vitellius defeated Otho; The Senate recognized Vespasian as ruler of Rome

70 Siege of Jerusalem: The Roman general Titus breached the walls of Jerusalem, sacked the city and destroyed the Second Temple

AD 71 Roman conquest of Britain: Roman forces entered modern Scotland

AD 79 Vespasian died. He was succeeded by his son Titus

AD 80 Rome was partially destroyed by fire; the Colosseum was completed

AD 81 Titus died of fever, and his younger brother Domitian succeeded him

96 Domitian was assassinated by members of the royal household; Nerva was declared ruler of Rome by the Senate

AD 97 Nerva adopted the general and former consul Trajan as his son

AD 98 Nerva died, and Trajan succeeded him

AD 117 Trajan died, and the Senate accepted the general Hadrian as ruler of Rome

AD 132-135 Bar Kokhba revolt in Judea

138 Hadrian adopted Antoninus Pius as his son and successor; Hadrian died, probably from heart failure. Antoninus succeeded him

AD 161 Antoninus died; Marcus and Lucius Verus succeeded him

AD 165-180 Antonine Plague

AD 169 Lucius Verus died of disease, leaving Marcus the sole ruler of Rome

AD 177 Marcus named his natural son Commodus co-ruler with himself

AD 180 Marcus died

AD 192 Commodus was strangled to death

The Late Empire

Roman forces in the east elected the consul Diocletian their ruler and proclaimed him augustus.

285 Diocletian gave Maximian the title Caesar

Diocletian proclaimed Maximian augustus of the west, ruling himself as augustus of the east

Diocletian established the Tetrarchy, appointing Constantius Chlorus to hold the office of Caesar under Maximian in the west and Galerius to hold the title under himself in the east

Diocletian issued the Edict on Maximum Prices, reforming the currency and setting price ceilings on a number of goods

303 Diocletianic Persecution

Diocletian and Maximian abdicated. Constantius and Galerius were elevated to augusti in the west and east; Galerius appointed Flavius Valerius Severus Caesar in the west and Maximinus II Caesar in the east

Constantius died at Eboracum; his troops acclaimed his son Constantine the Great augustus

306-312 Civil wars of the Tetrarchy

312 Battle of the Milvian Bridge

Constantine the Great and Licinius issued the Edict of Milan, providing for restitution to Christians injured during the persecutions

324 Battle of Adrianople

325 First Council of Nicaea

326 Constantine the Great ordered the death of his oldest son Crispus

Constantine the Great moved his capital to Byzantium and renamed the city Constantinople, the city of Constantine

337 Constantine the Great died; his sons succeeded him

Constantius II declared Julian (emperor) Caesar and granted him command in Gaul

Battle of Strasbourg: Julian defeated a vastly superior Alemanni force near Argentoratum, solidifying Roman control west of the Rhine

The Petulantes, ordered east from Paris in preparation for a war with the Sasanian Empire, instead mutinied and proclaimed Julian

augustus

361 Constantius II died of fever; succeeded by Julian

The army acclaimed the general Valentinian I the Great augustus; Valentinian the Great appointed his younger brother Valens augustus with rule over the eastern Empire, and continued as augustus in the west

Valentinian the Great died of a stroke his son Gratian, then junior augustus in the west, succeeded him as senior augustus.

Battle of Adrianople: A combined Gothic-Alanic force decisively defeated the Roman army near Edirne; Valens was killed.

379 Gratian named the general Theodosius I the Great augustus in the east

Theodosius the Great issued the Edict of Thessalonica, making Christianity the state church of the Roman Empire

Theodosius the Great died; his elder son Arcadius succeeded him as augustus in the eastern Byzantine Empire; the young Honorius became sole augustus in the Western Roman Empire under the regency of Magister militum Stilicho

Gildonic War: Gildo, comes from Africa, was killed following a failed rebellion against the Western Roman Empire

402 Ravenna becomes the capital of the Western Roman Empire

410 The Visigoths sacked Rome under their king Alaric I

The Byzantine augustus Theodosius II the Younger, the Calligrapher named the young Valentinian III, his cousin and Constantius III's son, Caesar with rule over the west; his mother Galla Placidia was appointed a regent

Battle of the Utus: The Huns under Attila defeated a Byzantine army in a bloody battle near the Vit

The Byzantine augustus Leo I the Thracian appointed Majorian Magister militum in the west

Battle of Cap Bon: The Vandal Kingdom destroyed a combined Western Roman and Byzantine invasion fleet at Cap Bon

Leo the Thracian died; his grandson Leo II succeeded him. Zeno became co-augustus of the Byzantine Empire with his young son Leo II

Basiliscus, brother of Leo the Thracian's widow Verina, was acclaimed

augustus of the Byzantine Empire by the Byzantine Senate

Zeno recaptured Constantinople and accepted Basiliscus's surrender; Germanic foederati renounced Western Roman authority; Odoacer conquered the Western Roman capital Ravenna, forced Romulus to abdicate and declared himself king of Italy; the Senate sent Zeno the imperial regalia of the Western Roman Empire

The Byzantine Empire

Augustus Justin I appointed his older son Justinian I the Great co-augustus with himself; Justin I died

The Codex Justinianus, which attempted to consolidate and reconcile contradictions in Roman law, was promulgated

Justinian the Great ordered the construction of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople

534 Vandalic War: A Byzantine force under the general Belisarius departed for the Vandal Kingdom

554 Gothic War (535–554): Byzantine forces crossing from Africa invaded Sicily and Rome

537 The Hagia Sophia was completed

565 Belisarius died; Justinian the Great died

602-628 Byzantine–Sasanian War of 602–628

634 Muslim conquest of the Levant

640 Muslim conquest of Egypt

Siege of Alexandria (641): Byzantine authorities in the Egyptian capital Alexandria surrendered to the besieging Rashidun army

663 Basileus Constans II visited Rome

Battle of Carthage (698): An Umayyad siege and blockade of Carthage forced the retreat of Byzantine forces; the city was conquered and destroyed

Basileus Leo III the Isaurian promulgated an edict forbidding the veneration of religious images, beginning the first Byzantine Iconoclasm

Second Council of Nicaea: An ecumenical council in Nicaea ended which endorsed the veneration of images, ending the first Byzantine Iconoclasm

1002 Byzantine conquest of Bulgaria

East-West Schism: The papal legate Humbert of Silva Candida laid on the altar of Hagia Sophia a document proclaiming the excommunication of Michael I Cerularius, the patriarch of Constantinople

Battle of Manzikert: A Seljuk force decisively defeated the Byzantine

Empire near Malazgirt; the basileus Romanos IV Diogenes was captured

1081 Nikephoros III Botaneiates was deposed and replaced as basileus by Alexios I Komnenos

1098 The First Crusader leader Bohemond I declared himself Prince of Antioch

1204 Siege of Constantinople: Fourth Crusaders breached and sacked Constantinople, deposed the basileus Alexios V Doukas and established the Latin Empire under their leader Baldwin I, as Latin Emperor

1261 Michael VIII Palaiologos conquered Constantinople and was crowned basileus in Constantinople along with his infant son Andronikos II Palaiologos

1326-1453 Byzantine-Ottoman Wars

1453 Fall of Constantinople: Ottoman forces entered Constantinople; Basileus Constantine XI Palaiologos was killed

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[20] The age and origin of the figures is a subject of controversy. The Lupa was long thought to be an Etruscan work of the 5th century BC, with the twins added in the late 15th century AD, but radiocarbon and thermoluminescence dating has found that it was possibly manufactured in the 13th century AD.

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